LETTERS

FROM

A FATHER TO HIS SON,

ON VARIOUS TOPICS

RELATIVE TO

LITERATURE AND THE CONDUCT OF LIFE.

VOL. II.

Written in the Years 1798 and 1799.

By J. AIKIN, M. D.

LONDON:

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Written in the Years 1758 and 1759.

BY

J. S. ADAM, M. D.

BRITISH MUSEUM

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LETTERS

FROM

A FATHER TO HIS SON.

LETTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.

Dorking, Surrey, 1798.

MY DEAR ARTHUR,

I RESUME the pen to you under circumſtances that may make my correſpondence more intereſting than formerly, though, perhaps, leſs inſtructive. The illneſs under which I have long laboured, and which ſeems to have ſapped all the principles of vigour in my frame, may well be ſuppoſed to have incapacitated me from efforts which require cloſeneſs of thinking, or depth of reſearch. But

the delightful retreat into which it has compelled me, has ſhed ſuch a tranquillity over my mind, and even furniſhed it with ſuch new ſubjects of pleaſing contemplation, that I feel better tuned, as it were, for epiſtolary converſe, than I could be in the midſt of the buſtle and cares of the metropolis. I may add, that I think myſelf able to ſpeculate more freely and impartially concerning the affairs of a world, my connexion with which promiſes to be of no long duration.

I reckon myſelf in no ſmall degree obliged to my indiſpoſition for the occaſion it has given me, in a more varied and delicious ſpot than I ever before inhabited, of once more obſerving the progreſs of thoſe rural phenomena, all beautiful in themſelves, by which Spring inſenſibly ſlides into Summer, and the youth of the year grows up to its full maturity. Amid the wooded hills and ſequeſtered vallies of this charming country, I have witneſſed the earlieſt notes of the returning nightingale and its migratory companions, and

the

the ſucceſſive expanſion of leaves, bloſſoms, and wild flowers, not more grateful to the ſenſes, than intereſting to the reflection. I have here again in ſome degree renewed the *botanical ardour*, which I recollect to have been a ſource of delightful ſenſations when firſt kindled in my breaſt, and which I ſtill find to beſtow peculiar intereſt on every ride and walk. In this manner I have been enabled to paſs with conſiderable enjoyment through ſome months of an indiſpoſition which has been characteriſed rather by languor and debility, than by ſuffering.

The agreeable ſpectacle of rural nature has, indeed, at a peculiarly ſeaſonable time engaged my attention, when otherwiſe I could ſcarcely have avoided fixing my mind too earneſtly on the deſolating proſpects which the late train of human affairs has preſented to the lover of mankind. What diſappointment of elevated hopes! what heart-rending ſcenes of public and private calamity! what audacity of crime! what triumph of violence and injuſtice!

Who but muſt turn with loathing from ſucceſſive fields of carnage, and ſhameleſs violations of all faith, equity, and humanity! Nor as yet do the clouds begin to diſperſe, nor can a gleam of brighter day be diſcerned through the gloom. On the contrary, the ſtorm rolls nearer, and the horizon becomes more and more involved in impenetrable obſcurity. In ſuch a ſtate of things, what can the powerleſs and aſtoniſhed ſpectator do better, than avert his eyes as much as poſſible from objects of unavailing regret, and endeavour to loſe the recollection of them in active employment, or pleaſing contemplation? When, in ſpite of human guilt and folly, I behold the face of general nature ſtill covered with its uſual ſmile, the vegetable and animal tribes paſſing through their accuſtomed round of being, and even the greater part of the human race itſelf probably little affected by theſe noiſy commotions,—I feel myſelf reconciled to the world, and able in ſome meaſure to controul my ſympathies for partial

ſuffering.

ſuffering. There has, in fact, been no period of time in which large portions of the earth have not been afflicted with ſimilar calamities. We are more acutely ſenſible of the preſent evils, becauſe they come nearer us, and have ariſen from cauſes whence we expected other conſequences; but one who enlarges his view to comprehend all the inhabitants of this globe, will find in the condition of Aſiatics and Africans as much to exerciſe his philoſophy, as in that of the more civilized Europeans. All are equally *men*, who ſtand in the ſame relations to their fellow-occupants of the earth, and to the Being who placed them here; and there is an equal neceſſity for ſuppoſing that man is, upon the whole, what his Creator intended him to be, in one part of the world, as in another, in order to ſatisfy our minds with reſpect to the plan of providence. No rational ſcheme, that I know of, can get rid of the *neceſſary exiſtence* of evil, and it is only to be made reconcileable to our feelings by the ſuppoſition

of as neceſſary a preponderance of good. I feel this to exiſt in myſelf, and I think I clearly diſcern it in the animated creation around me. The proportions of good and evil may vary at different times and in different places; but I conceive that the *mixture*, and the *preponderance*, are inſeparably connected with the nature of things, and therefore will always and every where remain.

The partial and temporary ſufferings of individuals may then be acquieſced in by the warmeſt philanthropiſt, and he may bring himſelf to conſider it as indifferent whether they be inflicted by human or material agents, by a war or a peſtilence. But ſince it ſeems as if man has in ſome degree the making of his own happineſs or miſery, and ſince reaſon and experience appear to be given him for the expreſs purpoſe of amending his condition, it is ſcarcely poſſible to witneſs the failure of proſpects of melioration by their aid, without a ſenſe of deep diſappointment. And one who has adopted the pleaſing

pleaſing theory of a progreſs in mankind towards improvement in virtue and knowledge, the chief excellencies of his nature, will more lament the ſubverſion that at the preſent period ſeems to threaten *principle*, than any of thoſe common evils which will undoubtedly meet in time with their uſual remedy.

Certain fundamental axioms reſpecting civil ſociety, on which all improvements in government and political inſtitutions were to be built, had long been making way among thoſe who dared to think and reaſon for themſelves, and were ſuppoſed to be almoſt out of the reach of any other attacks than thoſe of deſpotic power. Such are, "That government is intended for the good of the whole, not the ſecurity and emolument of a few—that its only legitimate baſis is common conſent—that equality of rights is eſſential to political juſtice—and that diverſity of religious opinions is no juſt ground of difference in civil privileges." We have lived, however, to ſee theſe principles ſo

far from being recognized as demonſtrated truths, that they are the firſt points called in queſtion by writers, certainly not deficient in ability, and enjoying conſiderable reputation with the public. Taking advantage of the ſuppoſed conſequences which have proceeded from the practical application of ſome of theſe maxims, they have been able to render them and their ſupporters the objects of ſuſpicion and abhorrence. In the dread of innovation which has become the epidemic of the day, ſubſiſting inſtitutions are defended by principles that apply to the moſt corrupt and tyrannical, as well as to the pureſt and moſt equitable—nay, as well as to thoſe which owe their exiſtence to the ſpirit of liberal reform. Our attachment to the Britiſh conſtitution is not required on account of the freedom of its origin, and the reſpect it has paid to the unalienable rights of man;—we are commanded to venerate it for its antiquity, to admire it as the combined wiſdom of ages, and to ſubmit to it becauſe we find it eſtabliſhed.

tabliſhed. Religion itſelf is not ſufficiently entitled to our reverence becauſe it is true, becauſe it provides the moſt effectual ſupport under the evils of life, and affords the moſt powerful aid to morality; we are principally called upon to value it as the great bulwark of civil authority, the adamantine chain by which mankind are held in ſubjection to a power of their own creation. Such modes of reaſoning have, indeed, the advantage of very general application, and admirably ſerve as a baſis of political union from Britain to Japan, from Ruſſia to Botany-bay.

Having formerly expreſſed my diſtruſt of the philoſophical maxim, "truth will prevail," I view this retrogradation (as I conceive it to be) without ſurpriſe. Its temporary cauſes are ſufficiently evident, though its future extent and conſequences baffle conjecture. I am chiefly concerned in viewing its progreſs in the minds of ſome individuals whom I love, and fain would eſteem. Of all the ſnares that entrap the feeble reaſon of man, one of the moſt

moſt dangerous is his natural propenſity to fly from one extreme to another. No ſooner do we think we perceive inconveniences following one ſet of opinions, than we are apt to conclude we cannot deviate too far from them, or too firmly embrace their contraries. But truth is not to be tried by partial or temporary reſults, nor are principles to be abandoned on account of their erroneous or abuſive application. It is probable, indeed candour ſhould lead us to ſuppoſe, that moſt of theſe new converts from reaſon to authority have not examined the extent of the ſyſtem they have adopted, or taken a full ſurvey of its conſequences. In their very diſcuſſions we ſee the remains of old habits; and if they acquieſce in the right of power to ſilence a diſputant, it is becauſe they have no apprehenſions of its being exerciſed againſt themſelves. I think I know thoſe among them who would not readily ſubſcribe to a belief of tranſubſtantiation, even were it made a part of the *ſtate-religion*; and who would not

not patiently ſubmit their lives and properties to the determination of a royal edict, even ſhould the force of a law be given to it by an *omnipotent parliament*.

But I mean not at preſent to enter farther upon topics of a public nature; and I ſhall content myſelf with inculcating upon you the value of preſerving a free and independent mind, a habit of eſtimating men and things by another rule than the opinion of the day, of making truth the great object of your reſearches, and of reſpecting yourſelf too much to be dazzled with artificial ſplendour, or awed by bold aſſumption. Theſe qualities I wiſh for you in the generous ſpirit of ancient philoſophy, which aſſerted the power of attaining real dignity independently of the allotments of fortune, and never called for inward homage to mere outward ſigns of ſuperiority. Should you ever be tempted (which, however, I do not much fear) to repine at the privations attached to an humble condition, recollect the animating language of that excel-

lent piece "againſt Inconſiſtency in our Expectations," which cannot be too often peruſed. "I have not theſe things, it is true; but it is becauſe I have not ſought, I have not deſired them: it is becauſe I poſſeſs ſomething better. I have choſen my lot. I am content and ſatisfied."

I know your diſpoſition too well to apprehend any danger from thus turning your view on the intrinſic elevation of a character in which ſuperior intellectual acquirements are united with moral independence. They who really poſſeſs theſe qualifications will be the firſt to be ſenſible of their own deficiencies, and of the merits of others. They will be able to make that true eſtimate of themſelves which is the baſis of all that is valuable in *humility*—a virtue, which at the preſent time, when ſo many cauſes operate to the depreſſion of all that is not borne up by rank and fortune, is not perhaps that which requires to be moſt ſtrongly recommended to natural modeſty.

For myſelf, if I cannot entirely ſay

Peregi

Peregi curſum, Spes & Fortuna valete;

I may at leaſt lay claim to a tranquillity with reſpect to all that remains, which leaves me at leiſure to ſtudy the advantage of thoſe who are dear to me. Among theſe, you will not doubt that you hold a diſtinguiſhed place.

Adieu!

J. A.

LETTER II.

ON PARTY.

DEAR SON,

In a country where freedom of diſcuſſion on public topics is permitted, no man capable of raiſing his views beyond mere perſonal intereſt, can paſs through life without ſome time or other engaging in *party*. Engliſhmen have been ſuppoſed peculiarly addicted to the conteſts and diſputes which proceed from this ſource; though I imagine this to have been owing rather to the ſuperior liberty they long enjoyed of following their inclinations in this reſpect, than to any peculiarity in their tempers and diſpoſitions. The objects which enter into party debates being thoſe on which the deareſt intereſts of mankind

mankind depend, it is no wonder that men ſhould differ in their opinions about them, and urge their differences with great warmth and earneſtneſs. Parties have therefore always been a characteriſtic of free ſtates; and though undoubtedly in ſome meaſure an evil, they are, like moſt evils, inſeparable from the good whence they originate. Their influence on the happineſs and reſpectability of individuals is alſo confeſſedly very great; whence there can need no apology to a father for converſing freely with a ſon on this topic.

There are various lights in which the ſubject of party may be conſidered as relative to an individual; and one of the moſt obvious for parental admonition would be the *prudential*. But this lies in a very ſmall compaſs; and were it my purpoſe to inſtruct you how you might manage the buſineſs of party ſo as to ſuffer the leaſt and gain the moſt in your pecuniary concerns, I ſhould think I had done enough by imprinting upon your memory the two ſage aphoriſms, "Take

no

no ſide at all," or, "Take the ſtrongeſt ſide."

But not to give you a leſſon which I could not enforce by my own example, and which, I believe, you would be very backward to learn, I ſhall proceed to conſider party in that light in which a ſenſe of the true dignity of character, and a regard to the public good, require that it ſhould be conſidered. With reſpect to the latter, indeed, an obſcure individual cannot, without a more ſanguine conſtitution than I poſſeſs, flatter himſelf with the power of producing any important effects; but every man may indulge the ambition of acting an honourable, virtuous, and conſiſtent part in life, as far as he is called upon to act at all.

I ſhall begin with inculcating on your mind the difference between *taking a part*, and becoming a *party-man*. The former denotes only ſuch an occaſional or ſubordinate interference in party affairs, as is conſiſtent not only with due attention to one's private concerns, but with a preſervation

ſervation of the ordinary intercourſes of ſociety and civility between neighbours and fellow citizens, though of oppoſite opinions. The latter, on the contrary, ſignifies ſuch an attachment to party as influences the whole character, and gives the tone and colour to a man's conduct through life. It is the ruling paſſion; and like all other paſſions ſcorns the controul of good ſenſe and moderation. To point out to you a ſingle perſon under the full dominion of it, would be ſufficiently to warn you of its baneful efficacy in poiſoning the comforts of life, and debaſing the moral character.

Suppoſing you, therefore, to remain maſter of yourſelf, and only to give party its turn along with other ſocial duties, let us inquire if there are any criteria by which you may always be directed to the right one.

It has long been a favourite maxim with many, that all parties are fundamentally alike, and that, however they may be diſcriminated by adverſe denomina-

tions, their principles of action are eſſentially the ſame. This is a very convenient doctrine for thoſe who are conſcious that their own rule of conduct is one and ſimple, namely, the purſuit of their intereſt. But though party-men may very much reſemble each other, yet I am perſuaded that there is in the cauſes themſelves enough whereon to found an eſſential diſtinction; and notwithſtanding this diſtinction may not coincide with any of thoſe party differences which are denoted by names and badges, as whig and tory, green and orange, and the like, yet I think it is in particular caſes ſtrongly enough marked to ſerve as a guide for the attachment of individuals.

Wherever power of any kind has been long and firmly eſtabliſhed, it has uniformly tended to accumulation and abuſe. The public ends for which it was originally granted have gradually been put out of ſight; privileges and diſtinctions, at firſt given merely in aid of the general purpoſe, have been claimed as private rights,

rights, and have at length become the leading conſiderations for which an inſtitution has been ſupported; and thus the *corporation ſpirit* has been introduced, to the utter ſubverſion of all true regard for the public welfare, and in contempt of the equity which ſhould regulate all concerns between members of the ſame community. To heap together inſtances of this abuſive progreſſion would be a ſuperfluous taſk, when there is not a corporate body in the kingdom, from the pettieſt country borough to the moſt impoſing and ſplendid edifice of ſtate, which does not afford an exemplification of the fact. I may, however, be permitted to *illuſtrate* its plan of operation by an example belonging to my own profeſſion.

In the reign of Henry VIII, a *College of Phyſicians* was conſtituted in London by charter, for the expreſs purpoſe of examining and admitting applicants duly qualified for the practice of phyſic in the metropolis, and excluding and interdicting quacks and empirics. Some of the firſt

members of this college were foreign graduates; and no condition of having received their education or degrees at any particular place was thought of with reſpect to them or their ſucceſſors; nor was any diſtinction of practitioners into different claſſes eſtabliſhed, but all profeſſional honours were left open to every phyſician of ſufficient learning and good morals. In proceſs of time, however, an innovation was introduced of diſtinguiſhing the phyſicians of London into two claſſes, fellows of the college, and licentiates; the former poſſeſſing all the collegiate powers and emoluments, the latter having ſimply the right of practiſing. And the ſame monopolizing ſpirit produced the further limitation, that no one ſhould be allowed to claim admiſſion to the fellowſhip of the college, who was not a graduate of Oxford or Cambridge. Such is the ſtate of things at the preſent day; and this abſurd and arrogant excluſion of men whoſe learning and profeſſional ſkill may be inferior to thoſe of none of their competitors,

tors, is pertinaciouſly maintained by a body, originally inſtituted for the ſole purpoſe of the public good, but perverted in its object by the mean jealouſy and ſelfiſhneſs ever attending the *corporation ſpirit*.

Hence, then, I take my ſole diſtinction of party; and I regard it as a matter of fact, that in all caſes where powers and privileges have been granted for public ends, there exiſts, in one ſet of men, a ſyſtematic plan of extending their limits to the utmoſt—of converting them into ſources of private emolument—and, in conſequence, of excluding as many as poſſible from the participation, by arbitrary teſts and qualifications;—while in another ſet there exiſts an uniform oppoſition to theſe uſurpations and abuſes, founded on the principles of univerſal equity and the general intereſts of the community. The former is the party of corruption; the latter, of reformation—the former, that of wrongs; the latter, of rights—the former, that of liberty; the latter, of ſlavery.

I do not mean, however, to aſſert that

the characters of individuals always correſpond with that of the parties under which they are arranged. The ſide of oppoſition may be taken from motives as ſelfiſh as thoſe of the defenders of uſurped power—from the mere deſign of occupying their places. Nor is it to be concealed, that a turbulent and diſcontented ſpirit, incapable of quiet ſubmiſſion to any authority whatever, a high degree of pride and ſelf-conceit, or a diſpoſition to wild and extravagant projects, occaſionally render men the general oppoſers of all exiſting inſtitutions. On the other hand, thoſe who act with a corrupt party are ſometimes not aware of the nature and extent of its profligacy, but from thoughtleſſneſs and a compliant diſpoſition are led to join in meaſures contrary to the general tenor of their principles and conduct. But after theſe due exceptions and allowances are made, a philoſopher will recur to the great and univerſal laws of cauſe and effect, and confide in their predominant operation, however varied or modified

modified by circumſtances. He will know, that according to the train of ideas which habitually paſs through a man's mind, ſuch will finally be the prevailing hue and tincture of that mind;—that arguments founded on fraud, ſophiſtry, diſingenuouſneſs, or an arrogant contempt of the rights of mankind, will infallibly contaminate the medium through which they paſs; while the habit of fair and free diſcuſſion, and conſtant appeals to the nobleſt principles of human action, cannot but tend to clear and expand the mental viſion. As far as my experience reaches, I can confirm to you theſe deductions of reaſon; and I do not heſitate to aſſure you, that I never knew a man ſeriouſly engaged in the ſupport of a narrow and unjuſt cauſe, whoſe mind was not proportionally warped and contracted, and made capable of mean and diſhonourable conduct. On the contrary, the worthieſt and moſt exalted characters I ever knew, have been thoſe nurtured in the language and reaſonings of a liberal cauſe.

Party has been ſaid, by one who had much perſonal experience of it, to be "the madneſs of many for the gain of a few." However juſt this character may in moſt caſes be, I cannot diſcern that the charge of irrationality neceſſarily applies to all who take a part in public conteſts. Men, indeed, who ſuffer themſelves to be hurried away by their paſſions; or who, from ignorance of mankind, entertain expectations which can never be realiſed, and put implicit faith in the declarations of every pretended zealot for their own cauſe, will always be liable to run into violence and abſurdity;—but they who are capable of making a ſober eſtimate of the value of the thing contended for, and of the motives and characters of the agents, need not forfeit either their temper or their good ſenſe by even an active interference in party. Nor am I convinced, that becauſe the leaders may be knaves, the followers muſt always be dupes and fools. Suſpected characters are often, on account of their abilities,

ſuffered

ſuffered to take the lead in conducting an honeſt cauſe; and while they perform their parts with ſpirit and conſiſtency, though it be but acting a part, they may deſerve the public ſupport and encouragement. Suppoſe them to be mercenaries, yet while they fight the battle well, they are fairly entitled to their hire. Nothing is more common, than that ſuch characters employ the prime of their exertions in the ſervice of the party they have ſpontaneouſly joined, and reſerve only the dregs of life and reputation for the work of proſtitution. When Pulteney ſunk from the hope and darling of the nation, to the deſpiſed and inſignificant Earl of Bath, whom did he dupe?—himſelf, and his purchaſers.

But I feel myſelf deviating into a diſſertation on parties, when it was my purpoſe only to give a direction to your ſentiments and conduct with reſpect to them. Confining myſelf, therefore, to this object, I ſhall make the ſuppoſition, that, unbiaſſed as you are by intereſt, you will not

not find it difficult to diſcover which is the preferable ſide, in moſt of thoſe caſes where you may be called upon to take a part. Certain ſyſtems of power are fundamentally bad. They manifeſtly never had the public good for their object. They are mere compacts of fraud and violence, by which the rights of the many are ſacrificed to the emolument of the few. They abhor all diſcuſſion, and rely for their continuance ſolely on the fears or prejudices of mankind. Concerning them, therefore, your judgment is not very likely to be miſled. But, as I have already obſerved, to judge truly and candidly concerning the individuals who ſupport ſuch ſyſtems is not ſo eaſy a taſk. So great is the force of early aſſociations on men's minds, and ſo complicated are all queſtions of fact and expedience in human affairs, that perſons of the pureſt intentions may be led to act in a manner totally different from that which you would conclude to be the reſult of fair and impartial examination.

When,

When, however, you find a man, not deficient in knowledge and inquiry, who, by ſtudied ſophiſtry endeavours to perplex where he muſt deſpair of convincing —miſleads from the true point of a queſtion, and ſtrives to wrap it in myſterious obſcurity—who throws out malignant inſinuations againſt the views and principles of his opponents, and is ever ready to ſupply the deficiency of argument by appeals to authority—who, moreover, has a manifeſt intereſt in the ſide he has taken, and in all probability would not have concerned himſelf at all with the controverſy had it not been for ſuch a motive;—when a man of this character falls in your way (and I fear you cannot walk far through life without ſuch an occurrence) heſitate not to determine, "Hic niger eſt"—he is bad at heart—a noxious animal, to be ſhunned or cruſhed as circumſtances may dictate. The moſt candid man I ever knew, whoſe character as well as name we both ſhould be proud to inherit, could never ſpeak without a mark-

ed indignation of thoſe who attempted to ſtifle truths of which they were themſelves perſuaded, and to force down falſehoods which they knew to be ſuch. There have been, and doubtleſs are, many Roman Catholics, who have received their abſurd and tyrannous ſyſtem of faith with ſuch a perfect conviction of its truth and importance, that they are prepared, with the beſt intentions, to uſe unwarrantable means for its ſupport and propagation; but Leo the tenth, who, amidſt buffoons and pandars, could ſay, "What a fine thing this fable of Chriſt has been to us!" and then employ all the reſources of impoſture and perſecution to maintain the papal power, was an unequivocal knave.

I do not mean, however, to encourage you to make uſe of hard words in controverſy, nor, except in very clear caſes, to give way to harſh opinions. And this leads me to warn you againſt that ſpirit of credulity with reſpect to perſons and things which is ſo diſtinguiſhed a feature of party. This it is which has filled our hiſ-

tories

tories with ſo many ſlanders and abſurdities, and which makes even the current topics of the day little more than a tiſſue of falſehoods and miſrepreſentations. I know party-men, of unblemiſhed character for veracity in other points, after whom I ſhould be loth to repeat even a probable ſtory. While ſome are enſnared by mere credulity, others are ſtill further miſled by a ſpirit of exaggeration, which is not quite ſo innocent as the former, ſince it cannot be entirely acquitted of conſciouſneſs and deſign. Both, however, proceed from the ſame raſh and ſanguine caſt of temper, and a preponderancy of the imagination over the judgment. I think it is *the Spectator* that gives an account of a perſon who uſed to make conſiderable gains by throwing himſelf in the way of theſe haſty people in their paroxyſms of party zeal, and offering them bets on the ſubject of their bold aſſertions. The loſs of money, however, is the leaſt evil ſuch a diſpoſition is liable to occaſion. The loſs of credit, even among

among thoſe of the ſame party, and a plentiful ſtock of falſe and diſtorted ideas durably impreſſed on the mind, are more ſerious miſchiefs. It is, indeed, this propenſity to weak belief that has thrown the chief ridicule upon party politicians, and rendered them ſuch favourable ſubjects for ſatirical repreſentation. One of the beſt correctives of this tendency is a ſtrong conviction that men are always men, liable to all the variety of motive ſuited to their nature—that complete folly and knavery are almoſt as rare as their oppoſites—and that wonders of all kinds are great improbabilities.

I ſhall cloſe my admonitions by a caution againſt the *littleneſs* of a party ſpirit. As the eſſence of all party is diviſion, its natural effect is to narrow our ideas, and fix our attention on parts rather than on wholes. A title, a badge, a dreſs, and various other *little* things, are apt to ſwell into importance in our imaginations, and to occupy the place of higher and nobler objects. Some party differences are in their

their own nature ſo inſignificant that every thing belonging to them muſt neceſſarily be petty and trivial. But even in thoſe grand conteſts which turn upon points materially connected with the happineſs of mankind, vulgar minds are uſually more engaged by the names of the leaders, and the banners under which they march, than by the cauſe. I think, however, that the ſtronger ſenſe of the preſent age has in a conſiderable degree corrected this error, and that the folly and favouritiſm of party have much abated. It may, in conſequence, have become more ſtern and intractable; but if we are to contend at all, let it be about principles rather than perſons, and with the ſpirit of men, rather than of children. It is true philoſophy alone which can elevate the mind above all that is low and debaſing; and oppoſite as the characters of *Philoſophy* and *Party* have uſually appeared, I deſpair not of their union in one breaſt.

Farewell!

LETTER

LETTER III.

ON THE ESTIMATE OF MORALS.

DEAR SON,

It might be imagined that few topics have been more thoroughly inveſtigated than thoſe which relate to morality; and that however deficient men may be in the practice of virtue, yet that their judgment of it in others, where perſonal prejudices do not interfere, is uſually ſound and accurate. This, I ſay, might readily be ſuppoſed; becauſe a man's moſt valuable qualities are diſplayed by their effects on thoſe around him; and from that teſt it would ſeem as eaſy to determine that one perſon excels another in goodneſs, as in ſtrength of body or powers of the underſtanding. Yet I am inclined to believe that

that very conſiderable miſtakes do actually prevail in the common mode of eſtimating moral character; and ſince it is impoſſible that errors in ſo important a point ſhould not be attended with hurtful conſequences, I ſhall think it a paternal office to lay before you ſome obſervations which may tend to correct theſe falſe conceptions.

Mankind, as it appears to me, are accuſtomed to attach too great a proportion of merit to the *negative virtues*. It was, indeed, natural that this ſhould ſo happen; for ſins of commiſſion being more obvious and alarming than ſins of omiſſion, the freedom from them gives a ſort of definite claim to the truſt and good opinion of ſociety. Men are naturally afraid of each other; the firſt advance, therefore, towards mutual regard is the diſcovery that they have no cauſe for mutual apprehenſion. Were I ſo unfortunate as to have my abode at the ſettlement in New South Wales, my firſt inquiry would be, which of my neigh-

bours were convicts, and which, voluntary ſettlers; and I ſhould certainly ſeek my acquaintances among the latter rather than the former. But in a ſtate of civilized and orderly ſociety, thoſe crimes which openly injure the public peace are ſo guarded againſt by law and cuſtom, that the merit of abſtaining from them bears no ſort of proportion to the demerit of committing them. And the ſame may be ſaid of thoſe vices which, though of a lighter dye, are yet objects of public ſcandal, and bring inevitable diſgrace. If, therefore, in forming our two claſſes of good and bad, we take our criterion from the preſence and abſence of notorious delinquency, though we may do tolerable juſtice to the bad, we ſhall admit many unworthy objects into the liſt of the good. This error, however, we are apt to fall into. We conſider more what a perſon does not do, than what he does; and where, perhaps, all the real temptation lies towards the non-performance of duties, we only look at his abſtinence from vices,

which

which he has no inducement to commit, and give him credit accordingly.

All virtue conſiſts in *effort*—effort to avoid evil and to obtain good: but how many are there who paſs ſpecioufly through the world without having made any conſiderable moral effort in their lives? An eaſy ſituation, a happy conſtitution of body and mind, tranquil times, indulgent friends, free many from the neceſſity of exerting any of the energies of the ſoul, either in acting or ſuffering. Such perſons may perhaps merit no particular cenſure;—"explent numerum," they fill up the number of which ſociety is compoſed; but let not the mere negation of what would be ſcandalous or puniſhable—the practice of the common decencies of life, be exalted into virtue!

I will give you an example of a character of this ſort. Mr. —— was born the heir to a conſiderable eſtate. He received the uſual education of perſons in his rank; and after paſſing through the little irregularities of youth, he married early

and ſettled at his paternal manſion. Here he lived pleaſantly and hoſpitably among his neighbours; opened his purſe in a hard ſeaſon to the poor; renewed his tenants' leaſes upon moderate terms; took his ſeat on the bench of juſtices, and acted (when he acted at all) with lenity; ſuffered his wife to regulate his family with decorum, and his phyſician to keep him to good hours and a ſober bottle; went to church conſtantly every Sunday morning, and took the clergyman home with him to dine; ſpoke kindly to his ſervants; avoided quarrels of every ſort; was civil about his game to all qualified ſportſmen, and not remarkably rigorous to poachers; took the prevailing ſide in politics, but could bear to converſe with the oppoſite party; ſerved the office of high-ſheriff with credit, and once in his life made a ſummer campaign with his county militia; —and thus, with an eaſy temper and good conſtitution, drew on to his fiftieth year, when a fever, caught by riding home after a club dinner, carried him off. "Poor

Mr.

Mr. ——! what a worthy man have we loſt!" cried all the neighbours; and the rector of the pariſh in his funeral ſermon compared him to all that is good and great among mankind; ſtyled him the true chriſtian, the father of the poor, the friend of his country, the model of gentility, and diſmiſſed him from this world of *toil* and *trouble*, to the enjoyment of a bleſſed eternity.

Thus it is, that maintaining a decent demeanour, fulfilling the common offices impoſed on ſocial life, complying with the cuſtoms of the world, and, above all, not interfering with the pleaſures and intereſts of other people, confer a reputation, which is generally in proportion to the rank and fortune of the perſon, and often in an inverſe ratio to the pains ſuch a conduct has coſt him. For, what have been the efforts or ſacrifices of a life like that above deſcribed? To the man in affluent circumſtances, what is the merit of a little pecuniary liberality?—to one not enſlaved by habit to any inordinate gratification,

what is the coſt of a temperance which excludes no enjoyment compatible with health?—to him whom all court and careſs, whoſe ſmiles are favours, and whoſe ordinary civilities are condeſcenſions, what is the taſk of affability and good-nature? —to the lover of his eaſe, placid, and perhaps timid, by diſpoſition, where is the virtue of unambitious retirement, and a pacific behaviour? If a computation is properly made, how much more is ſuch a man indebted to ſociety, than ſociety to him?

Still leſs is the merit of abſtaining from the violation of thoſe rules of decorum and morality, which public opinion has ſo eſſentially connected with certain ſtations and conditions of life, that the breach of them would totally exclude the culprit from all the comforts and advantages of reputable ſociety. Female chaſtity, in the more decent claſſes, has, in almoſt all civilized countries, been guarded by ſuch rigid cautions, and ſuch awful penalties, that it has almoſt ceaſed to be a virtue; though,

though, on the other hand, the forfeiture of it is juſtly regarded as the deepeſt ſtain to character, ſince it implies a contempt of that public eſtimation which is one of the beſt ſecurities for right conduct. It is therefore a great abuſe of ſpeech to uſe the term *virtuous* women, as ſynonymous with *chaſte*, ſince this quality may ſubſiſt in conjunction with every thing odious and contemptible in the female character. In like manner, the *decencies* belonging to the clerical profeſſion ought not to be reckoned among the perſonal good qualities of its individual members; ſince the obſervance of them implies no more than ſuch a regard to common propriety, as nothing but abſolute folly and profligacy could ſet aſide. Hence it is, that what is called *gravity* in many ſituations of life deſerves ſo little reſpect. A *vir gravis*, indeed, according to the Roman ſignification, was a highly eſtimable perſon, poſſeſſing that weight and ſolidity of character which fitted him for the moſt important concerns. But gravity of de-

meanour, as oppoſed to levity, is merely the dreſs of a dignified ſtation, and may eaſily be aſſumed along with the robe, the chain, and the peruke, by the moſt inſignificant tool of office, who has juſt ſenſe enough to avoid playing the fool out of ſeaſon.

In apportioning the praiſe due to a man on account of his freedom from blame, we ſhould conſider what are the vices to which he lies under the ſtrongeſt temptation, and value him principally according to his immunity from theſe. It is little for a trader to be regular and orderly, to abſtain from diſſolute pleaſures, to pay his debts, and live quietly and decently among his neighbours. But is he free from inſatiable thirſt after gain? does he ſcorn the cuſtomary frauds and tricks of his brethren in the craft? does he refuſe to take a ſhare in oppreſſive monopolies? is he ſuperior to the corruption of loans and contracts? will his ſenſe of equity prevent him from grinding a dependent by a hard bargain, whilſt he himſelf

ſelf uſes every artifice to enhance the price of his commodities? After a ſimilar mode of computation, the worth of the clergyman is to be eſtimated by his freedom from pride and indolence, his attachment to truth, and his diſdain of cant and ſervility;—of the lawyer, by his candour and urbanity, his conſiſtent zeal for juſtice, and his rejection of ſophiſtry and quibbles;—of the phyſician, by his ſcorn of petty intrigue, puffing, and pompoſity.

A very common, and at the ſame time very pernicious, cauſe of erroneous judgment in morals, is the diſtinction attempted to be eſtabliſhed between public and private character; as if it were poſſible to ſeparate the man from his duties, or to ſplit the latter into different branches entirely unconnected with each other. A prince, abſolutely without feeling for his people, whom he neglects or oppreſſes, ſhall obtain high commendation for his piety, affability, taſte for the fine arts, or ſkill in mechanics. A prime miniſter ſhall plunge his country into needleſs or unjuſt

unjuſt wars, ſupport and extend the ſyſtem of fraud and corruption, and carry on a train of pernicious meaſures which in his heart he diſapproves, merely to keep himſelf in place; and the nation ſhall be inſulted with ſtories of his good-humour and pleaſantry, his domeſtic and companionable qualifications, and his claſſical erudition. A city magiſtrate ſhall neglect all the duties of his office, and connive at every abuſe; yet he ſhall be thought to fill the chair with reputation becauſe he treats his old friends with familiarity, gives liberal entertainments, and is polite to the ladies. But are not the king, the miniſter, the magiſtrate, as much eſſentials of the man as the huſband, the father, and the friend? are they not equally ſocial relations, differing only from the more ordinary ones in their ſuperior importance? and can there be any propriety in characteriſing a perſon from his performance of the leſſer duties, while he is groſsly deficient in the greater? This meretricious facility in granting reputa-

tions is an evil of deep reach, ſapping the very foundations of rectitude; and forms a ſure ſymptom of prevailing profligacy. By the ſole qualities of pleaſantry and good-nature, without honour, without ſenſibility, without the leaſt regard to the public welfare, Charles the ſecond became one of the moſt popular monarchs of the Engliſh line, and was praiſed to the ſkies both living and dead;—but it muſt not be forgotten that this was at a period of the moſt conſummate depravity recorded in our hiſtory. Enough of this inconſiderateneſs is, however, ſtill left, to introduce great confuſion in our moral ideas; and, when enforced by the ſpirit of adulation, it is capable of producing much miſchief to the beſt intereſts of ſociety.

The criterion of virtue which it is moſt important for mankind to eſtabliſh, is the *good* a man does; not the abſolute quantity, but the proportion relative to the means he poſſeſſes; and not the indolent and involuntary, but the active and intentional good. A rich man cannot ſpend

his

his fortune in perſonal gratifications without imparting much benefit to the neighbouring poor; but that may be no part of his purpoſe; or if it has occaſionally given a particular direction to his plans, the exertion is too trifling to deſerve applauſe. But if, foregoing the natural love of eaſe and enjoyment, he makes uſe of the advantages of his ſituation to carry on ſome great deſign of public utility, he may claim the praiſe of ſubſtantial goodneſs, and in ſo much a higher degree, as the ſacrifices he makes are greater. Let the meaſure then be, the good done, combined with the effort made in doing it. In ſuch a ſcale, a Howard will ſtand higher than moſt kings and ſtateſmen that ever exiſted; yet the cottager, who after a hard day's work in providing for his family, robs the evening of its looked for repoſe in order to cultivate the potatoe-ground of his ſick or abſent neighbour, may perhaps deſerve to ſtand as high as he. A Titus, who ſaid he had loſt the day on which he had done no good deed

—if

—if he meant by ſuch a deed, conferring an unmerited gift on ſome greedy courtier, wrung from the neceſſities of his induſtrious ſubjects, and coſting him nothing but the will to beſtow—may deſerve more blame than praiſe; but an Alfred, conſuming his days in cares and hardſhips more ſevere than thoſe of his meaneſt ſubjects, and devoting his whole exiſtence to the noble purpoſe of making a people happy, reaches the very ſummit of virtue, and is by ſo much a better man than others, as he is a greater.

All human characters are *mixed* characters; but the term, in a moral eſtimate, is uſually applied when the debaſing mixture is not merely a defect or foible, but an acknowledged vice. Even in theſe caſes, however, we ſhould not loſe ſight of the grand principle in the computation, that of effort employed in doing good. Such exertion, ſteadily and faithfully carried on, amid all the temptations of indolence, all the allurements of intereſt, and all the intimidations of hazard, may form a decided

a decided balance of merit, which can never be attained by the mere negation of blame. The good done may be felt by a whole nation; the evil ſuſtained may be ſcarcely perceptible by any effects on ſociety. While the Roman world was enjoying all the benefits of a wiſe, vigorous, and humane adminiſtration under the emperor Trajan, it ſignified little in compariſon how he paſſed his evenings among his intimates in the receſſes of his palace. Accordingly, the epithet *optimus* was aſſociated to his name on the moſt ſolemn occaſions for ages after his deceaſe. It muſt, however, be confeſſed that even the private vices of a public character are very apt to ſhed a baneful influence on thoſe parts of his conduct which regard the community. The paſſion of Henry IV of France for gaming, and his incurable weakneſs with reſpect to the fair ſex, perpetually involved him in difficulties, and threw occaſional reproach both on the wiſdom and the juſtice of his government.

Men

Men of virtuous principles have, I think, been too much afraid of contaminating them by entering into active life, and have liſtened too readily to the ſiren ſtrains of poets and philoſophers, who have praiſed the ſilent vale of retirement as the true abode of pure and exalted virtue. Doubtleſs, a man may in this ſituation render eſſential ſervices to his fellow-creatures; but when diſappointment, indolence, or timidity are the motives for retreat (which I fear is generally the caſe), it is ſeldom to be expected that even within his narrow circle the recluſe will exert himſelf to do all the good in his power. He is more likely to keep within the limits of his ſtudy and garden, ſeeking eaſy amuſement from

> Saunter with a book, and warbling muſe
> In praiſe of hawthorns;

than to take the poſt of the Hampden or Howard of his village. Such an one fears leſt in the commerce of the world he ſhould be obliged to do things which he

he could not thoroughly approve, and to employ means and inſtruments which he muſt deteſt. I will not aſſume the maxim "that the end always juſtifies the means;" but I will not ſcruple to ſay, that he who would ſerve mankind muſt in ſome meaſure ſerve them in their own way; and that if he thinks it neceſſary to wait till the paths are perfectly clean before him, and all moral infection is purged away, he will come to the cloſe of his own journey through life before his public courſe commences. That the poſt of danger is the poſt of honour, is as true with reſpect to virtue as to life; and that man betrays an unworthy diſtruſt of his principles who declines putting them to the proof.

Moraliſts have anxiouſly ſcrutinized into the *motives* of good actions, upon the purity of which they have made their whole merit to depend. But have they not been too curious in their inquiries? If a man ſteadily perſiſts in a courſe of beneficence, ought we not to be ſatisfied with

with him; and may we not assure ourselves that the habit of doing good, whencesoever it originated, will eventually form a good character? Nature has subjected our minds to the operation of many motives towards the same things, with the wise purpose, that should one prove insufficient, others might come in aid. The love of fame, the desire of consequence, the hope of future reward, even the simple appetite for employment, become useful auxiliaries to the pure sentiment of benevolence, or the aspiration after the divine favour. Virgil has properly combined into one operation the "amor patriæ," and the "laudum immensa cupido;" and more rigid moralists, who have rejected the latter as a spurious principle of virtue, in the place of man as formed by his Creator, have substituted a creature of their own imagination, a kind of moral monster, acting and acted upon in a manner of which human nature affords no example. Such overstrained and fictitious representations of perfection are,

in my opinion, more calculated to depreſs and paralyze the mind through deſpair, than to rouſe it to generous emulation. An actual Ariſtides or Waſhington are abundantly more animating than the viſionary and impoſſible *wiſe man* of the Stoics.

Adieu!

LETTER IV.

ON A CRITERION OF PERFECTION IN WRITING.

You muſt frequently, I doubt not, have felt equal ſurpriſe and diſguſt at the dogmatiſm with which the moſt oppoſite opinions relative to the comparative merit of authors are laid down in writing and converſation; and you muſt have wiſhed for ſome poſitive criterion to apply to theſe opinions, in order to aſcertain their ſolidity, at leaſt to your own ſatisfaction, if not to the conviction of the diſputants themſelves. Attempts have been often made, in the walks both of literature and the fine arts, to eſtabliſh ſuch a criterion, and to reduce to preciſe rules the determinations of what is called *taſte*; but the

wide differences ſtill ſubſiſting among thoſe who lay claim to this quality, ſufficiently prove the ill ſucceſs of theſe efforts. Senſible as I am, that diverſities either in original conformation, or in early aſſociations, muſt ever prevent mankind from feeling exactly alike with reſpect to the objects preſented to them, I have no ſanguine expectations of a near approach to uniformity in their judgments; yet I conceive it poſſible that a train of thought may be ſuggeſted by which a tolerably unprejudiced mind may make ſome progreſs towards the attainment of rational principles in matters hitherto left to the deciſion of vague ſentiment. I do not ſee why it ſhould be leſs practicable to ſtate the grounds of our preference of one work of genius to another, than of one moral action to another; and I conceive the ſame general method may be applied in both caſes; namely, to conſider what was the *end* in view, and how far the *means* employed have accompliſhed their purpoſe. All the works of human art may be

be examined upon this principle; but I ſhall at preſent confine myſelf to the nobleſt of all, that of *writing*, or *literary compoſition*.

The firſt and moſt obvious purpoſe of writing is to communicate with all poſſible force and preciſion the ideas of the writer to the mind of the reader. This effect is abſolutely indiſpenſable; and therefore every failure ariſing from the feeble, the inadequate, the embarraſſed, the ill-arranged expreſſion of thoughts, is abſolutely contrary to the perfection of a writing. I will not ſtop to particularize inſtances of this defect; yet I cannot forbear obſerving that many works which bear a high character, if judged of by the difficulty found in developing their meaning, the ambiguities and perplexities remaining after every effort of learning and ſagacity to elucidate them, and the feebleneſs with which they at laſt ſtrike the mind of the reader, muſt be very ſhort of that perfection which prejudiced admirers attribute to them. Great allow-

ances, doubtleſs, ought to be made in favour of works compoſed in a language long extinct, and referring to modes of thinking or living long obliterated. Yet ſome of the works to which I allude are known to have preſented theſe difficulties from the time of their firſt appearance; and a compariſon with others of the ſame period will ſhow that the faults belonged to the individual, not to the age.

What has been ſaid above refers to *ſtyle* in its moſt confined ſenſe, or the manner in which a writer gives enunciation to his ideas; and the point of perfection thus far is that the language ſhould be an exact tranſcript of the thought. This alone includes many of the firſt qualities of writing. It ſuppoſes in the writer a perfect knowledge of the value and import of all the words he uſes, as well ſingly as in combination; a knowledge which forms no mean part of philoſophy, and cannot be attained without much reflection and reſearch. It ſuppoſes him maſter of the art of combining clauſes

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and ſentences ſo as to exhibit in the cleareſt manner the dependence of ideas one upon another, and the train or ſucceſſion in which the proceſs of argumentation conſiſts. It requires him to have at hand a ſufficient ſtore of expreſſions, and yet to be poſſeſſed of judgment enough not to run into prolixity; to know how long he may dwell upon an idea with advantage, and when its further repetition would be weariſome tautology. It may likewiſe be extended to include that ſenſe of propriety and decorum, that air of good company, which prevents an author from ſhocking his reader by vulgariſms, or diſguſting him by ſingularities. By theſe, which I think are intelligible and poſitive requiſites, a criterion may be eſtabliſhed of writing, as far as it is the dreſs or image of thought.

But the merit of the *thoughts* themſelves cannot be ſeparated from our notion of good writing; and many of its qualities muſt have a reference to the *powers of conception* in the mind whence the ideas

proceed. Here, it muſt be confeſſed, our criterion becomes more vague; and we are in danger of being thrown into all the fluctuation of opinion attendant upon ſubjects of mere taſte. Our only reſource in this caſe is a compariſon between the effects apparently intended to be produced by the writer, and thoſe really produced; —in other words, what he has attempted, and what he has done.

The attempt in ſome caſes is ſo ſimple that it is not difficult to pronounce concerning its ſucceſs. The enunciation of a truth, and the ſtatement of a plain argument, as in ſcientific topics, are complete with reſpect both to conception and expreſſion, when all that is wanted, and no more, is communicated to the reader in its moſt preciſe and intelligible form. Clear notions, in ſubjects of this kind, almoſt neceſſarily clothe themſelves in proper language; and no one, while receiving the whole inſtruction he ſeeks for, feels a want of any thing more perfect. Mathematical demonſtrations, and didac-

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tic leſſons of art or ſcience, are of this kind. In theſe, if the writer is methodical, clear, and conciſe, he has done his part.

The narration of a matter of fact perhaps comes next in point of ſimplicity; but here, diverſity of conception has a much wider ſcope. Circumſtances ſtrike different perſons ſo differently, that two are rarely found to agree in their account of the ſame tranſaction, if in any degree complicated. Independently of the propenſity to alter and exaggerate, the ſelection of incidents varies much in different relators. Some dwell minutely upon what to others would appear frivolous and unintereſting. Some dramatiſe a ſtory by aſſigning to each actor his own peculiar language; others relate the whole in their own words. In general, he is the moſt perfect narrator, who puts his reader moſt completely in the ſtate of a ſpectator; who tranſports him to the very ſpot, marks out to him all the perſonages by their characteriſtic features, and fills the

the ſcene with manners and action. For ſucceſs in ſuch an attempt, nothing is ſo neceſſary as an imagination capable of receiving and retaining ſtrong impreſſions. Where this exiſts, and the ſubject of deſcription is an intereſting one, no great artifice of language is requiſite for producing a complete effect; and frequently, the moſt perfect ſimplicity, and the abſence of all deſign, prove moſt ſucceſsful. The ſtory of Joſeph in the Old Teſtament is manifeſtly written without the leaſt art or effort, yet a more affecting one is perhaps no where to be met with. Many other narrations in the Jewiſh ſcriptures are equally unpretending and equally excellent; and it is a remarkable circumſtance, that the oriental ſtyle, ſo ſtrained and figurative in lyrical, prophetic, and even didactic compoſitions, ſhould be ſo ſimple in the deſcription of facts. But this kind of negative merit is almoſt all that is wanted in the ſpecies of writing in queſtion; and if the relator has taſte enough to abſtain from affected phraſeology,

logy, unſeaſonable digreſſions, and impertinent remarks, he can ſcarcely fail, with a ſelection of ſtriking incidents, to produce the deſired effect.

The next in order of ſimplicity ſeems to be, an attempt to convince by a proceſs of argumentation addreſſed to the reaſon. When a perſon is maſter of his ſubject, and has it laid up in his mind in its proper ordonnance of gradation, proceeding from the ſimpleſt propoſitions to the more complex, and eſtabliſhing a regular ſeries of deduction till he arrives at the intended concluſion, it may be thought that his power of communicating to others the notions he himſelf entertains, will follow almoſt of courſe. Yet, I believe, experience has ſhewn that men of undoubted intellectual ſagacity have not always been happy in attempts of this kind; and on reflection it will be ſeen that literary talents, if not of the higheſt claſs, yet rare and reſpectable, are required for attaining the firſt rank as a logical or argumentative writer. Great preciſion in the

the uſe of words, clear arrangement of all the members of a ſentence, cloſeneſs of method, ſtrength and conciſeneſs of expreſſion without harſhneſs or obſcurity, are eſſential to perfection in this department of writing; and if ſomewhat of the grace and amenity of language be added, which is not incompatible with the other requiſites, the effect of conviction may be promoted, by leading on the reader pleaſantly through a topic perhaps naturally dry and unalluring. I conceive Cicero and Hume to be examples of this union of every uſeful and agreeable quality in diſcuſſions purely philoſophical.

If the manner of the former of theſe writers in his ſtricter philoſophical works be compared with that in his popular ethical pieces, and his orations, a juſt idea may be formed of the progreſs from an addreſs to the reaſon alone, to an attempt to perſuade by addreſſing the affections likewiſe. This combination is *oratory* or *eloquence*; and there are few occaſions of importance in human life in which the poſſeſſion

poſſeſſion of this quality, either in ſpeech or writing, is not felt as a high degree of ſuperiority. Its field, too, is ſo large, that its point of abſolute perfection is ſcarcely aſſignable; and *genius*, that celeſtial faculty, to the powers of which no limits can be aſſigned, finds in it ſufficient play for all its energies. Rhetoric has long ago been defined "the art of perſuaſion;" its end, therefore, is ſufficiently obvious; and it may be ſaid, in a general way, to be perfect when it attains that end. But there will commonly be room to aſk, Would not ſomething more excellent have anſwered it better? might not a more ſkilful orator gain over conviction to the oppoſite ſide of the queſtion? Reaſon, by itſelf, is a principle of tolerably equal operation in minds properly diſpoſed to receive it; but where the paſſions are of the party, no one can be ſure of the event. Taſte alſo aſſumes great ſway where appeals are made to the imagination or to the finer feelings; and admiration may contribute to bias the

the deciſions of the judgment. The perfection of oratory, then, will be ſeen to be a very complicated conſideration, referring not only to the ſubject treated of, but to the perſons to whom it is addreſſed. Let us, however, limit the caſe to an addreſs to perſons prepared by a certain degree of refinement in manners, and of acquaintance with the beauties of literature; to perſons, alſo, of ſenſe and knowledge of the world, and under no immediate impreſſion of enthuſiaſm. In theſe circumſtances, I conceive that argument ſhould be the ſtaple, the main body, of the diſcourſe; and that the appearance of a declamatory effuſion of common-place rhetoric ſhould by all means be avoided. But argument may be greatly aſſiſted by the variety of lights in which it is placed—by ſtrong deſcriptions, pathetic or humorous, reſulting from real or hypothetical conſequences of the matter in debate—by drawing to a luminous point or focus all the inferences and deductions flowing from the train of reaſoning

reaſoning—and by a ſtyle of language animated with energetic expreſſions and lively images. In theſe particulars conſiſts the true art of oratory, an art which it is in vain to teach by formal rules, enjoining certain diviſions and ſubdiviſions of a ſubject, and directing the orator when to be warm, and when to be cool, when ſimple, and when metaphorical. Such ſyſtematical rhetoric produces nothing but pedantic and tedious harangues, which weary the patience of every hearer, and though they may be applauded in the ſchools, are of no uſe or effect in real life. The orator who wiſhes to perſuade, muſt take his rules from his ſubject, his audience, his own feelings, and his own peculiar talents; for talents of very different kinds may by proper management be made equally to concur in the grand effect of perſuaſion. In ſome, a rapid ſtrain of argument, ſtrictly deduced from the matter in debate, delivered in earneſt, glowing, but not choice or ornamented language, and

dwelling long and fully upon the ſame topics, has proved highly ſucceſsful. Such appears to have been the eloquence of the Grecian Demoſthenes; and ſuch is that of a ſpeaker, certainly not his inferior in powers of mind, the Engliſh Fox. This ſpecies, however, ſeems better adapted for oral delivery, than for writing. To the hearer its effect is enhanced by the accompaniments of voice and action; nor is he liable to be offended with negligencies or tautologies which might give diſguſt in the leiſurely ſurvey of a reader. On the contrary, the wide reach and compaſs of thought, the ſplendour and copiouſneſs of illuſtration, the profuſe imagery and poetical conceptions of a Burke (a man whom I know not where to parallel), might often bewilder and fatigue the hearer, while to the reader they have afforded the higheſt gratification, and often proved irreſiſtibly convincing. The ſtrong, pointed, homely ſenſe of a Paine, however, has not been inferior in efficacy to his antagoniſt's profuſion

fuſion of excellencies; and thus every different mode of oratory, if practiſed by a maſter, may produce in its favour the criterion of perfection. This is, to convince the reaſon in the very face of prepoſſeſſion; to wield at will the paſſions; to calm the furious and rouſe the torpid; in ſhort, to effect by the mere power of perſuaſion, all that can be done by brute force or all-ſubduing gold.

The perfection of hiſtorical compoſition demands a ſtill greater aſſemblage of literary qualifications. Oratory, in the direct form of harangues, once conſtituted a part of it; and ſome of the beſt ſpecimens of eloquence of this kind are to be found in hiſtories. But though this practice is now aboliſhed (I think, judiciouſly, as it injured the moſt eſſential of all impreſſions, that of veracity), yet occaſions continually occur in an intereſting narrative in which ſcope is given for the moſt genuine eloquence. And notwithſtanding it may be true, that authentic hiſtory, however written, is capable of giving

pleaſure, yet I preſume there are few readers to whom it would be indifferent whether they took the relation of Agrippina's landing at Brunduſium, of the trial of Strafford, of the death of Mary queen of Scots, from a Tacitus, Hume, or Robertſon, or from one of the vulgar chroniclers of the time. Moreover, we expect from the complete hiſtorian a lucid arrangement and ſkilful developement of facts, often involved and perplexed with contradictions; ſagacity to trace the connexion of cauſes and effects; penetration to detect the motives and true characters of men, however diſguiſed by artifice; together with that philoſophical ſpirit and freedom from prejudice which entitle the writer to aſſume the office of an inſtructor, and point the great leſſon of human events. Poſſeſſed of theſe requiſites, the hiſtorian may be allowed conſiderable latitude in his ſtyle. If he is merely perſpicuous, correct, and elegant, he will avoid blame; but he will not attain the praiſe of a fine writer without the power of enriching his

language, when the ſubject favours him, with every figure that can give it force, majeſty, and beauty. Hiſtorical writing is in proſe, what the epic is in verſe—a field for every varied exertion of which the compoſer's mind may be capable.

This obſervation leads me to the ſpecies of compoſition with which I mean to conclude; Poetry—the moſt difficult of all to reduce to the laws of critical judgment. The diſtinguiſhing purpoſe of poetry has often been ſtated to be that of *pleaſing*; but various explanations ſeem neceſſary before this principle can be adapted to uſe. Perhaps the whole buſineſs of *verſification* may at once be referred to the *pleaſure* it is by experience found capable of giving to the ear; an idea I ſhould willingly admit, as it would eſtabliſh an eaſy diſcrimination between poetry and proſe by a ſingle characteriſtic, which otherwiſe is not to be found. But in order to eſtimate the value of the other ingredients of which poetry is compoſed, we ought, I conceive, to proceed beyond

the ſimple notion of pleaſing, and expand our idea of the art to the comprehenſion of *all that in writing is capable of imparting to the mind every impreſſion in its moſt exquiſite degree.* It would lead me too far were I to enumerate the various figures of poetry, and attempt to ſhow how each contributes to the augmentation of *impreſſion.* It is obvious, however, that the figures of compariſon illuſtrate and enforce the original idea; and that proſopopæia and perſonification bring the ſcene directly before the eye, and beſtow on it life and action. That the peculiarities of poetical language alſo give *pleaſure* I mean not to deny; and perhaps poets have in ſome caſes more attended to the amuſement of their readers, than to the enforcement of a particular ſubject. This ſeems eſpecially to be with ſome writers the intention of *ſimile*, which, if purſued to minuteneſs, as many of Homer's, ſubſtitute a new picture to the imagination, often to the temporary obliteration of the original one. But this is really a fault when it interrupts

interrupts the courſe of a narrative of itſelf highly intereſting.

The poetry of deſcription and of ſentiment is no other than *eloquence in verſe*; and the advantage of this form over that of proſe ariſes from the pleaſure, and indeed, in ſome caſes, the conſonance of effect, obtained by meaſured harmony, together with the licence of uſing without reſtraint thoſe figures which give glow and animation to language. One of the moſt perfect examples of the efficacy of theſe means is Pope's epiſtle of Eloiſa to Abelard, of which the thoughts are almoſt all to be found in the real correſpondence between thoſe celebrated characters: but how are they heightened, how adorned, how animated by the rich melody and vivid expreſſion of that great maſter! Compare, too, the ſketch given by Virgil of the battle of Actium with any proſe relation of the ſame event. With how much more force and diſtinctneſs is the ſcene brought to view! how is it aggrandized by a ſelection of great in-

cidents, and the ſuppreſſion of every thing petty and trivial! above all, what dignity is thrown about it by the introduction of fictitious perſonages, ſuperior to human! It is this uſe of *fiction* that many critics have regarded as the principal characteriſtic of true poetry; and doubtleſs, when it contributes to enhance the deſired impreſſion, it is the nobleſt exertion of poetical genius. But how frequently is it found that the introduction of celeſtial beings only tends to degrade the human; and that the mixture of preternatural events *unrealizes* (if I may uſe the expreſſion) the natural part of the fable? The mere production of wonder and ſurpriſe, which ſome have repreſented as the moſt eſſential buſineſs of poetry, is often attempted with at leaſt as great ſucceſs in proſe; witneſs the Arabian Nights, and the whole claſs of novels and romances. On the other hand, ſome of the fineſt poems are limited to what is ſtrictly natural in deſcription, only heightened by a ſelection of the moſt ſtriking circumſtances and

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the moſt perfect ſpecimens, and ſet off with all the glow and relief of ſtrong colouring.

I return then to the criterion of perfect poetry, and venture to ſuggeſt that it conſiſts in the *force* with which it impreſſes the heart or the imagination, joined to the *pleaſure* it affords by the artifice of its numbers, and by the variety and ſplendour of its diction. The number of ſubjects on which poetry is employed, and the different forms it is made to aſſume, will ever allow a wide ſcope to the diverſities of taſte in ſelecting its favourites; nor can any general rules controul the effect of partial aſſociations. It is, however, deſirable that the mind ſhould acquire a ſenſibility to excellence of as many kinds as poſſible; and he is the happieſt reader of poetry who can enjoy the maſterpieces of every age and country, and in every ſpecies of poetical compoſition. There ſeems to be a greater propenſity to make compariſons of merit in this, than in any other department of

literature; and in none does dogmatiſm of opinion ſo much prevail. It is an uſual thing for thoſe who are the moſt rapturous admirers of one author, to affect the profoundeſt contempt for another, perhaps his rival in general fame. Yet I imagine the criterion above mentioned, if fairly applied, will afford as deciſive a teſt of poetical merit, as exiſts for many other kinds of literary excellence. One exception, however, muſt be admitted. It is impoſſible for any one to acquire an adequate feeling of the beauties of *verſification* in a foreign language; and therefore he ſhould decline all compariſons in this point except between the writers in his own.

From the notion above given of the perfection of poetry, I think it will follow as a corollary, that true taſte cannot approve any of thoſe devices for making it eaſier to the compoſer which have been lately practiſed, conſiſting of looſe verſification, the abſence of rhyme where expected, proſaic ſimplicity of language, and the

the like; for, that the real purpoſe of ſuch liberties is to favour the lazineſs of the writers, and not to add an agreeable variety to their performances, I am well convinced. As poetry is a luxury and not a neceſſary, its multiplication is not an object to be ſtudied at the expence of its excellence; and a little of it, of the fineſt kind and richeſt flavour, anſwers its purpoſe much better than an abundance of ordinary growth.

What, then, after theſe particular inquiries, ſhall we ſay conſtitutes the general perfection of writing? I can diſcover no other univerſal principle in this caſe, than that which is applicable to every effort of art—the degree in which it accompliſhes the purpoſe intended. This conſideration will, no doubt, ever leave room for ſome diverſity of judgment; ſince neither the purpoſe, nor its attainment, will appear exactly in the ſame light to all. Yet I cannot but think that it offers a more promiſing acceſs to uniformity, than might be conceived

ceived by one who had never ſeriouſly dwelt upon it. Erroneous judgments, eſpecially of the unfavourable kind, are often made from the unreaſonable expectation of what was never deſigned—of what was impoſſible to be effected.

Let the critic then begin with obtaining a clear idea of what he ought to look for in a work of literature, and not pronounce its condemnation becauſe he does not find what ignorance alone could have led him to expect. With a judgment ſo prepared, and a mind free from ordinary prejudices and partialities, he will probably ſeldom fail of deciding rightly concerning that *approach* to perfection, which is all that the condition of human nature will permit to the moſt exalted genius.

Farewell!

LETTER V.

ON AUTHORITY IN MATTER OF OPINION.

DEAR SON,

I NOW mean to fulfil an expectation I formerly raiſed, of making the important topic of *authority* the ſubject of a letter. It is the authority exerciſed over the underſtanding, to which I ſhall confine my diſcuſſion; a ſpecies, concerning which it may be aſſumed, that man has given up none of his rights on entering into ſociety, and therefore that it is at all times fully open to inquiry. There have been ages, indeed, in which ſubmiſſion to authority was conſidered as one of the moſt ſacred duties; and no arguments were allowed to be adduced againſt the dictates of thoſe who had obtained, no one exactly knew

knew why, poſſeſſion of the maſter's chair. It ſeemed to have been ſuppoſed that the human mind had met with a ſudden check in its growth; or that the ſoil was worn out in which every valuable product was to be reared and brought to maturity. This degrading opinion, thanks to the great men whoſe performances have refuted it, is now almoſt brought to an end, and its relics ſerve for little more than to ſupply a cant to the idolaters of ancient art. Still, however, the ſecret influence of authority is very conſiderable. A large maſs of opinion is continually on float which has, in fact, nothing elſe to ſupport it; and indolence gladly excuſes itſelf from the labour of reſearch by the plea of reſpectful acquieſcence. Nothing is more common than to ſee a writer quoted with this preface—"from whoſe authority there is no appeal;" and this is moſt frequently ſaid with reſpect to matters of taſte, which are reducible to no ſtandard, but are perpetually varying with age and country. That no human being, however, can deſerve

ſerve ſuch a compliment to his judgment, will be admitted by all who ſoberly conſider the imperfection of our nature, and the advantages derived from increaſed experience in correcting the premature concluſions even of men of the moſt exalted underſtandings.

I can conceive only of two caſes in which authority ſhould be received with any thing like implicit confidence. The one is that of atteſtation in matter of fact, where the relator is fully competent with reſpect to means of information, and has no aſſignable motive for falſification. But clear as the theory is in this inſtance, the application is encumbered with ſo many doubts and difficulties, that a prudent man will not often be led to give complete aſſent to a great improbability, from the weight of any ſingle teſtimony whatever. The embarraſſing queſtions "Was he really competent?—Had he no bias or prepoſſeſſion capable of miſleading him?—Was he diligent and accurate enough in his inquiries?—Did no intereſt in his mind

mind preponderate the ſimple love of truth?"—can ſo ſeldom be anſwered to our perfect ſatisfaction, eſpecially when relating to things diſtant in time or place, that we oftener, perhaps, acquieſce in ſilence for want of a diſtinct objection, than feel unequivocal conviction. I do not mean, however, to deny, that this degree of conviction is ſometimes perfectly juſt and reaſonable.

The other caſe of deciſive authority, is that of propoſitions and deductions in the *exact ſciences*, made by thoſe whoſe ſuperior ſkill in them is univerſally acknowledged. The proceſs of demonſtration, when purſued by ſuch *maſter-minds* as a Kepler, a Newton, a Leibnitz, is ſo ſure, eſpecially when confirmed by mutual agreement, that I ſhould imagine there is nothing human ſuperior to it in certainty, and that it leaves no ground for an appeal to any other judicature. But an adept in ſuch ſtudies can alone determine the caſes in which this complete demonſtration takes place; and perſons

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of leſs knowledge muſt rely upon their ſecondary authority.

In all ſubjects on which the opinions of mankind (I mean, the inſtructed part of them) vary, it is evident that the deciſion cannot be ſafely entruſted to mere authority; for two oppoſite authorities, if equal, mutually deſtroy each other; and to compare and balance authorities, with reſpect to number and weight, upon any diſputed topic, is a taſk far beyond the abilities of one who is himſelf only a beginner in inquiry. The firſt ſtep, therefore, in reaſoning ſhould be to detach the argument from the man; for though arguments are deluſive, names are ſtill more ſo; and even ſhould error be the reſult, the exerciſe of reaſon in the deliberation is always of itſelf uſeful; whereas the blind ſubmiſſion to authority is only an act of indolence or ſervility. At the tribunal of reaſon, every partaker of that divine gift has a right to take his ſeat; and though modeſty will inculcate a deference to the judgment of thoſe of our fellow-

aſſeſſors

aſſeſſors whom we know to be better informed than ourſelves, yet it can never be our duty to acquieſce without examination. There is a danger, indeed, leſt ſelf-conceit, and an averſion to controul, ſhould diſpoſe a young reaſoner to reject opinions ſupported by authority, merely becauſe they are ſo ſupported. But this is generally only a temporary evil, and the more habitual propenſity of the mind is to give way to thoſe cauſes which exert a durable influence in favour of authority. Some of theſe I ſhall proceed to conſider particularly.

The firſt opinions we imbibe upon any ſubject can ſcarcely fail to obtain a dictatorial ſway. We naturally apply for inſtruction to that ſource which has been pointed out to us as the beſt. Conſcious, at leaſt, that our inſtructor knows more of the matter than ourſelves, we for ſome time go on receiving all his notions implicitly, by which means they gain a preoccupancy in our minds; and, if enforced by veneration for living worth, or admiration

ration of deceaſed abilities, they become ſo aſſociated with ſentiment, that mere argument on the oppoſite ſide has a very unequal conflict to maintain. Thus we often ſee even keen and candid inquirers never able to free themſelves from the ſhackles of ſyſtems in which they have been educated; and though it is manifeſt, in the general reckoning, that an advantage which every ſet of opinions makes uſe of in its turn, can fairly belong to none, yet few are capable of bringing back their minds to that ſtate of indifference which is neceſſary for holding the balance of examination perfectly even. To thoſe who would foſter a generous error in preference to an ungrateful truth, what I am going to ſay will appear harſh, and perhaps narrow. But I am convinced that the only effectual way of liberating ourſelves from the ſervitude of authority, is to lower our ideas of individual excellence. Though the firſt emotions of an ingenuous and feeling mind on hearing the lectures, or reading the writ-

ings, of a great maſter, will be admiration and acquieſcence, yet if they are not in due time ſucceeded by a perception of thoſe defects which are inſeparable from every thing human, the ſtudent will remain in a ſtate of perpetual pupillage, and by cloſe application and increaſing years will acquire nothing but a confirmation of prejudices. Hence it is, that ſo many men, who have entirely devoted themſelves to literature, yet prove ſuch indifferent critics. Referring all their notions of excellence to certain exiſting models, they become incapable of expanding their conceptions to rules of compoſition formed upon the eternal dictates of good ſenſe. Taſte is with them a mere ſyſtem of favouritiſm; and judgments which ought to be the conſequence of general principles, are made the reſult of private partialities. The hiſtory of criticiſm abounds in inſtances of this falſe mode of eſtimation; of which I ſhall ſelect one or two, as particular exemplifications of my meaning,

ing, the more ſtriking as they are modern.

Dr. Blackwell of Aberdeen compoſed a large volume on the life and writings of Homer, upon the following idea. Aſſuming as a poſtulatum, that the Grecian bard was the greateſt poet that ever has been, can, or will be, he endeavours to ſhew how this has come to paſs. With conſiderable learning and ingenuity, he inveſtigates the ſtate of ſociety in which Homer lived, the particular relations in which he ſtood to it, and the objects of art and nature with which he muſt have been converſant; and he plauſibly argues that all theſe circumſtances with reſpect to him were exactly ſuited to the production of whatever is moſt excellent and admirable in poetry. But having dazzled his imagination at ſetting out, with a phantom of perfection which has no exiſtence in nature, he is rendered incapable of perceiving, that the ſame incipient ſtate of civilization, the ſame ſimplicity of thinking and ſpeaking, which

gave force and truth to Homer's deſcriptions of natural objects, and of the workings of untutored minds, were the cauſes of the puerility and abſurdity of his repreſentations of ſupernatural agency, and prevented him from feeling the tediouſneſs of his repetitions, the flatneſs of his perpetual epithets, the meanneſs of his morality, and the diſguſting effect of his ſcenes of butchery and carnage.

A reſembling inſtance of ingenuity perverted by extravagant admiration is given by the author of an "Analyſis of the principal characters of Shakeſpeare." Laying it down as an axiom "that Nature and Shakeſpeare are the ſame," he employs much moral and metaphyſical ſubtlety in accounting for the ſingularities and ſeeming inconſiſtencies obſervable in many of the perſonages of his drama, and ſpins many a fine web of reaſoning in order to reconcile to probability the eccentricities of an author, of all the moſt careleſs and negligent. That Shakeſpeare poſſeſſed wonderful powers of painting the

the paſſions, and even of entering into the minute and recondite operations of character, will not be denied; but what ſober critic will alſo deny, that no one ever exerted his powers more irregularly; that through haſte or indifference he admitted numberleſs defects even in his beſt performances; that his plots and the ſketches of his characters are often borrowed from the leaſt reſpectable ſources; and that his language is frequently highly ſtrained and artificial when we ſhould expect it to be moſt ſimple and natural? No writer of fiction ever deſerved, or can deſerve, to be regarded as authority in the degree here aſcribed to Shakeſpeare; and ſuch implicit confidence can only ſerve to miſlead the critic who yields to it. A thorough conviction that no man ever ſtands ſo apart from his ſpecies as to be free from fallibility of judgment, and inequality of effort, can alone guard us againſt the erroneous concluſions of enthuſiaſtic admiration.

The over-rating of real excellence is

however a much more reſpectable cauſe of exceſſive deference, than that regard which proceeds from the rank, wealth, and ſtation of the claimant. To concur with an opinion merely becauſe it is uttered from a high place, infallibly denotes a weak and ſlaviſh mind; and the courtier who reſolved always to regulate his hours by a watch preſented to him by his ſovereign, however it might vary from other watches, was not more really abſurd, than thoſe who catch up with reverence every ſentiment that falls from titled lips, and ſquare their own notions in conformity with it. This ſpecies of ſervility, however, is for the moſt part temporary in its operation, and extends little beyond the circle immediately ſurrounding the great; and I believe Mr. Walpole's liſt of Royal and Noble Authors carries as little authority with it as any literary catalogue that could be formed. With us, we have only two profeſſions in which nobility is the reſult of intellectual eminence—the church and the law. In both, it is probable that the

the dignity may occaſionally ſtamp an opinion with more than its real value; yet a ſturdy controverſialiſt is little moved by this popular eſtimation; and there is diverſity enough in legal and theological doctrine to keep the balance of authority from inclining always to one ſide, even when delivered *ex cathedra*.

One principal ſource of the empire of authority is the pain often felt from a ſtate of doubt, joined to the weariſomeneſs of perpetual inquiry. Theſe feelings induce many, in a fit of impatience, either to revert to the opinions they imbibed in early youth, or to acquieſce in thoſe of the laſt book they read, or the laſt diſputant they heard. This proceſs is uſually termed *making up one's mind*; that is to ſay, ſhutting it againſt the admiſſion of any new light: a mode of ſettling belief which ſeems not very conſiſtent with the character of a creature of reaſon. There are ſubjects, indeed, on which a man, after having tried the full force of his mind, may rationally decline further inquiry, on

the conviction that certainty is not attainable reſpecting them. But this termination will be in ſcepticiſm or indifference, not in dogmatiſm. Such, I conceive, are the metaphyſical diſputes concerning matter and mind, liberty and neceſſity, with which a perſon may very properly determine to perplex himſelf no longer; but if his concluſion is, to believe henceforth as this or that Doctor believes, he may be juſtly charged with a violation of good ſenſe. I may be miſtaken in the inſtances above given, and may be told that my notion of the eſſential uncertainty of thoſe topics is only a proof that I have not ſufficiently ſtudied them. Be it ſo. I only mean to aſſert that ſome ſuch topics exiſt in the field of metaphyſical debate. Other queſtions there are, ſuch, eſpecially, as relate to hiſtorical truth, on which it is poſſible, during one proceſs of inquiry, to collect all the evidence of which the matter can ever be capable. Where a perſon has done this, and after a full and fair trial of the cauſe has found reaſon to make a poſitive

poſitive deciſion, he has a right ever after to abide by it; and this, perhaps, is the only caſe in which *making up one's mind* is perfectly allowable. But here the conviction ſhould reſult from one's own inveſtigation, not from reliance upon that of others; it is therefore only ſo far an acquieſcence in authority, as ſuperior credit is given to one narration of facts above another.

There are ſome prejudices which, when once broken through, leave the mind in aſtoniſhment that it could ever have ſubmitted to them. Such is that of annexing authority to antiquity. In conſequence of a falſe analogy, we aſſociate the idea of age and experience to the circumſtance of having lived long ago; and thus we invert the proper notion of the "wiſdom of ages," and look for it at the wrong end. We paint to our imaginations a man with grey hairs, and calling him by the venerable name of father, inveſt him with the ſame authority over our opinions, as that real relation confers

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while we are children. Thus we have fathers of poetry, of hiſtory, of criticiſm, of phyſic, of the church, whoſe precepts and examples it was long conſidered as a duty to receive with profound reſpect, which many ſtill pay through want of reflection. In fact, all the authority which accumulated knowledge and experience can beſtow is on the ſide of a modern when compared with an ancient; and the latter can only poſſeſs the advantage of ſuperior genius, which there ſeems no reaſon to attribute to him except from individual proof. In demonſtrative ſcience, and in thoſe arts which can be brought to the teſt of utility, this deluſion in favour of antiquity has neceſſarily given way; but in matters of mere taſte or opinion its ſway is yet conſiderable. We have ſeen in this country, at the cloſe of the eighteenth century, that it has been thought worth while to publiſh more than one new tranſlation of "Ariſtotle's Poetics," with elaborate commentaries, as if he were ſtill the ſtandard of critical judgment,

ment, and the legiſlator in that ſpecies of compoſition. But if we for a moment reflect, that Ariſtotle was acquainted with no other writers than thoſe in his own language; that of many kinds of poetry there exiſted in his time no models at all, and of others, only very recent and imperfect ones; that in the lapſe of two thouſand years the objects of nature and art, the forms and manners of ſocial life, and the facts of every kind that have been added to the ſtock of human obſervation, are innumerable; ſurely, no rational opinion of his ſuperior talents will ſuffice to maintain him in the dictatorial chair.

The caſe in which, above all others, authority is to be ſuſpected and withſtood, is when we ſee fraud or force employed in its ſupport. It may ſafely be concluded that the intereſts intended to be promoted by it when thus ſupported, are not ſimply thoſe of truth and mankind. Whatever be the pretexts, the power or emolument of a particular order are always the real objects; at leaſt they are thoſe of the plot-

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ting head, though the unconſcious hand may ſometimes be ſet in motion by a benevolent though miſtaken intention. As the beſt things are moſt capable of abuſe, we need not wonder that national religion has in all ages and countries afforded the moſt glaring example of authority thus enforced, and thus perverted. It has always appeared, either as the ſervant, the partner, or the maſter, of the civil power. Among the Romans, where the prieſthood did not form a ſeparate claſs, but was drawn from the ariſtocracy, the national religion was uſed as an inſtrument to awe and controul the democracy, and to keep up that patriotic ſpirit which ſo often ſaved the ſtate, but at the expence of the reſt of mankind. In Egypt, Perſia, Gaul, and ſome other countries, where the doctrines and rites of religion were the private poſſeſſion of a particular order, they enabled their depoſitaries frequently to tyrannize over the ſecular powers, at leaſt to hold divided dominion with them. But of all the religious

ligious bodies that ever exiſted, the chriſtian prieſthood has, with the moſt uniform policy, employed its own authority and that of the ſtate in its perſonal aggrandizement. By turns the coadjutor, the diſturber, the ſervant, and the maſter of the ſtate, it has accommodated itſelf to all conjunctures, and has never failed to advance its claims in proportion to the readineſs with which they were admitted. That prevailing branch which, under the name of the church of Rome, obtained the eccleſiaſtical ſovereignty over all the faireſt and moſt civiliſed countries of Europe, diſtinguiſhed itſelf by an aſſumption of authority over the ſouls and bodies of men, more intolerable than the world had ever witneſſed. Its head, by the monſtrous pretence to infallibility, eſtabliſhed a dominion which no human limits could circumſcribe. The triumph of authority over reaſon was indeed complete, when men pre-eminent in genius, learning and virtue, bowed to the deciſions of the papal ſee as ſo many oracles from heaven. Nor

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was it only in the myſteries of theology that this ſway was exerted. It embraced queſtions in ſcience; and the great Galileo, the glory and diſgrace of his age, was obliged to retract what his mind had received as a demonſtration, at the command of monks and prelates. Such a fabric, reared by the combined operations of impoſture and violence during a number of centuries, was not—perhaps never will be—overthrown by the arms of reaſon alone. And ſo baneful have been its effects in debaſing every manly principle of the human mind, that its final ſubverſion can ſcarcely be purchaſed at too high a rate. The eſſence of popery cannot change while a particle of the ſyſtem remains; ſince it conſiſts in that aſſertion of authority inherent in a particular claſs of men, which conſtitutes them the ſole judges of religious truth. It is this claim, and not particular abſurdities of doctrine or practice, which ought to have united all the attacks of reformers; but unfortunately

tunately ſome of them have not refuſed to participate in it.

Whenever, in a controverted point, one of the parties refuſes to deſcend upon equal terms into the field of argument, and calls on the civil power to ſilence and puniſh its antagoniſt, all authority of opinion on that ſide is at an end; and how great ſoever may be the names that ſupport it, their teſtimony ſtands for nothing in the eye of reaſon. They *may* be ſincere in their belief, but by a want of reliance on their own cauſe they afford juſt grounds for ſuſpecting their ſincerity. No one, it has been ſhrewdly ſaid, is againſt reaſon, but when he is conſcious that reaſon is againſt him. Not much leſs ſuſpicious is that dogmatical aſſumption of the upper ground in controverſy, which entrenches itſelf in ſuppoſed rights and prerogatives, treats as a violation of order and decorum the free uſe of language in its opponents, and even while it condeſcends to employ arguments, ſeaſons them with arrogant and uncharitable reflections

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on the motives and intentions of the adverſary. This conduct is with admirable ſpirit and energy expoſed in Rouſſeau's Letter to the archbiſhop of Paris, in reply to his "Mandement" againſt that author's "Emile." "How much at your eaſe (ſays he) do you dignitaries talk! Recogniſing no rights but your own, nor laws but thoſe yourſelves have impoſed, far from thinking it your duty to be juſt, you do not hold yourſelves bound even to be humane. You haughtily overwhelm the weak, without anſwering for your own violations of equity to any one. Inſults coſt you no more than violences. On the leaſt call of intereſt or ſtation, you ſweep us before you like duſt. Some burn and anathematize, others defame and diſhonour, without right, without reaſon, without contempt, even without hatred, merely becauſe it is part of the order of things, and becauſe the unfortunate object ſtands in your way. When you inſult us with impunity, we may not even complain; and if we diſplay our innocence and

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your wrongs, you accuſe us of treating you with diſreſpect."

This picture is perhaps overcharged for England; yet even among us the demand for *reſpect* in favour of exiſting authority is carried to an unwarrantable length, and our *dignitaries* of all ſorts are as unwilling as their neighbours to quit the vantage-ground of title and high place. Reſpect (further than the public peace is concerned) can only be juſtly claimed by ſuperior talents and virtues, by diſintereſtedneſs and liberality. A "humble Foſter" may deſerve it, when "ten metropolitans" cannot make the leaſt title to it.

To conclude—never forget, my ſon, that human authority can be no more than a relative and limited thing—that whether founded on genius, knowledge, or experience, it may be balanced, and perhaps overweighed—and that mankind, in matters of opinion, as well as of civil inſtitution, are to be conſidered as at all

times poſſeſſing their entire privileges, which no acquieſcence of their predeceſſors can abrogate.

Yours, &c.

LETTER VI.

ON MILTON'S GARDEN OF EDEN, AS A SUPPOSED PROTOTYPE OF MODERN ENGLISH GARDENING.

DEAR SON,

In the former ſeries of letters addreſſed to you, there was no topic, I believe, in which I might ſeem to go ſo much out of my way, as that of the modern ſtyle of gardening. Neither you nor I were likely ever to poſſeſs more than a flower-plot and a cabbage-ground; and I might well have left the fortunate owners of numerous acres devoted to ornamental purpoſes, to diſcover by their own experience what mode of laying them out would on the whole afford them moſt enjoyment. I have had the ſatisfaction,

however, to find that my ideas on the ſubject did not remain unſupported; and a very elegant writer on the art (Mr. Uvedale Price) has not heſitated to confeſs, that the ſacrifices made to faſhionable taſte in his own pleaſure-grounds have conſiderably infringed his habitual gratifications *. But I do not mean to reſume the topic at large; and my pre-

* "I may perhaps have ſpoken more feelingly on this ſubject, from having done myſelf, what I ſo condemn in others,—deſtroyed an old-faſhioned garden.——I deſtroyed it, not from diſliking it; on the contrary, it was a ſacrifice I made againſt my own ſenſations, to the prevailing opinion.—— I remember that even this garden (ſo infinitely inferior to thoſe of Italy) had an air of decoration, and of gaiety, ariſing from that decoration,—*un air paré*—a diſtinction from mere unembelliſhed nature, which, whatever the advocates for extreme ſimplicity may alledge, is ſurely eſſential to an ornamented garden." *Eſſ. on the Picturesque*, Vol. II. The writer goes on to mention ſeveral particulars, as a raiſed terrace, an arched way leading to a lower compartment, a ſummer-houſe covered with a Virginia creeper, an iron gate at the entrance of a grove—the recollection of which gives him peculiar regret.

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ſent letter will only relate to a piece of literary criticiſm incidentally connected with it.

The character of the late lord Orford (Horace Walpole) as a writer and critic may, I think, without injuſtice, be ſaid to have been more diſtinguiſhed by vivacity and fancy, than by ſolidity and correctneſs. A propenſity to ſtart new and paradoxical opinions ſeems to have been one of his ruling paſſions; and the inſtances in which he indulged it with reſpect to hiſtorical diſquiſitions are well known to Engliſh readers. His ſucceſs in making converts on theſe points, has not, I believe, been conſiderable; but a literary opinion, perhaps as extraordinary as any of theſe, which he has maintained in his "Obſervations on Modern Gardening," has apparently had better fortune, and probably now compoſes an article in the current poetical faith of the country. This is, that Milton, in his deſcription of the garden of Eden, exhibits a ſort of anticipation of the modern

ſtyle in that art, which he foreſaw "by the prophetic eye of taſte." As I imagine this notion may eaſily be proved to be an error, and as the errors of a Walpole are worth refuting, and the diſcuſſion may prove not unentertaining, I ſhall make it the ſubject of a letter.

I muſt begin with aſſerting, that it is far from my intention to depreciate the deſcriptive powers of our great bard in this inſtance, in praiſe of which more might be ſaid than has been done by the author in queſtion, though upon different grounds. But I ſhall endeavour to ſhew, that the plan of Milton's Paradiſe is appropriated to it as a peculiar ſcene in creation, and by no means was intended to ſerve as a model for gardens made by human hands—and alſo, that there exiſted various poetical deſcriptions of a ſimilar kind before his time, ſome of which could ſcarcely fail of being preſent to his memory when he wrote.

Milton explicitly declares his idea of Paradiſe,

Paradiſe, by ſaying that it was "the garden of God," containing

"In narrow room Nature's whole wealth."

To have laid it out, therefore, in parterres, ſtraight walks, terraces, and the contrivances of art, would have been an abſurdity equal to that of placing Adam in a palace of Grecian architecture; and it did not require the genius of a Milton to avoid ſo groſs an impropriety. It was evidently his buſineſs to paint a *natural ſcene*, enriched with all the variety of delightful objects that could be aſſembled in one ſpot. With this, he was to join ſome of the local particulars belonging to Eden as deſcribed in the book of Geneſis; and alſo to throw over the whole ſomewhat of the air of a ſelected retreat, encloſed and ſet apart for the uſe of its newly-created inhabitants. All theſe purpoſes he has accompliſhed. For the firſt, he brings together every choice product of the vegetable creation; flowers "worthy of Paradiſe," trees "weeping odorous

gums and balm," or hung with delicious fruit "burniſhed with golden rind;" to theſe he adds "flocks grazing the tender herb," and "all kind of living creatures new to ſight and ſtrange," enlivening the ſcenery with their ſports and gambols. He makes his "criſped brooks" roll over beds of "orient pearl and ſands of gold;" and thus ſtudies to furniſh the favourite ſpot with *rareties* and *minute beauties*, which I conceive the modern landſcape-gardener would think ſcarcely objects of his attention. It is true, the larger features of Paradiſe, its hills and dales, lawns and ſlopes, woods, lakes, and ſtreams, are materials that a Brown would chooſe to work upon; but where is the lover of nature who has not dwelt with delight upon theſe beauties as compoſing the charms of every fine country; and in what new manner has Milton combined them ſo as to give him a claim to ſuperior fancy or taſte in rural ſcenery? Mr. Walpole's imagination carries him at once from Eden to Stourhead and Hagley. What

reſemblance

reſemblance there is to the firſt of theſe places in a river paſſing "ingulpht through the ſhaggy hill," I pretend not to know; but it is manifeſt that the poet conducts the river of Eden in this manner, in order that he may afterwards divide it commodiouſly into the "four main ſtreams" running to different parts of the world, according to the ſcriptural account. From this ſubterraneous river the garden could in no other mode be ſupplied with water, except "through veins of porous earth with kindly thirſt updrawn;" and if theſe unite in a fountain, whence rills are made to flow on all ſides, viſiting each plant and flower, I conceive the idea rather to have been derived from the mode of irrigation practiſed in all hot climates, and eſpecially in the gardens or *paradiſes* of the eaſt, than to have been a poetical foreſight of Hagley. With reſpect to the fence or encloſure of Eden, it is indeed grandly conceived, and in a ſtyle much more appropriated to the ſcene than the walls of gold and gems with which

which ſome poets have ſurrounded their Bowers of Bliſs; yet it has a ſtiffneſs and uniformity which would not ſuit the pencil of a landſcape-painter. I much ſuſpect, too, that the image in Milton's mind of the "flow'ry arbours," and "alleys green," the keeping which in nice order was the principal employ of our firſt parents, partook too much of the artificial, to correſpond with the principles of Engliſh gardening in the moſt approved modern taſte. After this view of Milton's *real* picture, not the partial ſketch of it drawn by Walpole, few readers will probably ſympathize with this writer in his fear leſt "our deſcendants ſhould defraud the poet of half his glory by being perſuaded he had copied ſome garden or gardens he had ſeen, ſo minutely do his ideas correſpond with the preſent ſtandard." It was, indeed, as Milton himſelf characteriſes it, "a happy rural ſeat of various view"—the only adequate conception of a ſpot ſelected by God himſelf for the habitation of his favoured creatures,

tures, and meant as a kind of epitome of the whole earth. But that Milton tranſferred this notion to gardens properly ſo called, the work of human art, there ſeems not the leaſt reaſon to ſuppoſe. On the contrary, where he mingles the idea of a garden with his Eden, he dwells upon that artificial culture, and that ſelection of vegetables gratifying to the ſmell and taſte, which in all prior ages had conſtituted the definition of this innocent and elegant luxury.

I proceed to ſhew, that Milton's deſcription of Paradiſe, whatever be thought of it, is ſo far from originality, that there are more parallel paſſages in the poets relative to ſuch ſcenery, than to moſt other topics that came in his way. He himſelf alludes to thoſe claſſical ſpots, the field of Enna, the grove of Orontes, and the Nyſeian iſle, as ſimilar ſcenes, though much inferior in beauty to his Eden. The Elyſian fields of Virgil are ſlightly ſketched upon the ſame plan; but the Enna of Claudian, in his Rape of Proſerpine,

ſerpine, contains many of the ideas particulariſed; the inequality of the ground, the fountains, rills and lakes, the ſhady groves, and the profuſion of flowers.

Forma loci ſuperat flores: curvata tumore
Parvo planities, & mollibus edita clivis
Creverat in collem: vivo de pumice fontes
Roſcida mobilibus lambebant gramina rivis.
Silvaque torrentes ramorum frigore ſoles
Temperat, & medio brumam ſibi vindicat æſtu.
— — — — — —
Haud procul inde lacus (Pergum dixere Sicani)
Panditur, & nemorum frondoſo margine cinctus
Vicinis palleſcit aquis. Lib. II. 101 & ſeq.

The land's fair form its flow'ry pride ſurpaſs'd;
A wavy plain upheav'd its ſwelling ſides
And grew into a hill; from living rock
A guſhing fountain bath'd the dewy graſs
With quivering rills; a wood with ſhady boughs
Tempers the burning ſunbeams, and ſecures
'Mid ſummer heats a winter all its own.
Not diſtant far, begirt with leafy groves,
A lake expands, and from its margin green
The neighbouring waters take a ſoften'd hue.

Surely it cannot with truth be ſaid of the writer of theſe lines (to which many more, equally

equally deſcriptive, might be added) that he "had not dropped a hint" of the ſcenes of Eden.

But it is in the Italian poets, the favourite ſtudy of Milton, that we are particularly to ſeek the origin of many of his ideas; and the gardens of Alcina by Arioſto, and of Armida by Taſſo, may be conſidered as the true prototypes of the terreſtrial Paradiſe. See how Arioſto luxuriates in his painting.

Culte pianure, e delicati colli,
Chiari acque, ombroſe ripe, e prati molli,
Vaghi boſchetti di ſoavi allori,
Di palme, e di ameniſſime mortelle,
Cedri, ed aranci, ch'avean frutti, e fiori,
Conteſti in varie forme, e tutte belle,
Facean riparo ai fervidi calori
De' giorni eſtivi con lor ſpeſſe ombrelle;
E tra quei rami con ſecuri voli
Cantando ſene giano i roſignuoli.
Tra le purpuree roſe, e i bianchi gigli,
Che tepida aura freſchi ognora ſerba,
Sicuri ſi vedean lepri, e conigli,
E cervi con la fronte alta, e ſuperba,
Senza temer ch'alcun gli uccida o pigli,
Paſcano, o ſtianſi ruminando l'erba.

Saltano

Saltano i daini, e i capri ſnelli e deſtri,
Che ſono in copia in quei luoghi campeſtri.
ORL. FUR. Cant. VI. 20—22.

Here cultur'd plains and gently-riſing hills,
Moiſt meadows, ſhady banks, and limpid rills,
Citron and orange gay with fruits and flowers,
With laurel, myrtle, twin'd in odorous bow'rs,
Oppos'd in various forms, all fair and gay,
Ward off the burning ſuns, the ſultry day;
While in their tufted ſhades with fearleſs flight
Dwells, warbling clear, the charmer of the night.
Amid the roſes red, and lilies pale,
Still blooming freſh as breathes the tepid gale,
Secure appear the rabbit and the hare;
And lofty ſtags that fear no hunter's ſnare,
Here lie at eaſe, or crop the tender green,
And friſking roes, and goats with active mien,
In numerous herds play through the ruſtic ſcene.

If ſome of the features of Milton's Eden may be diſtinctly traced in theſe lines, the whole ſcenery is perhaps more exactly repreſented in the garden of Armida.

Poi che laſciar gli avviluppati calli,
In lieto aſpetto il bel giardin s'aperſe;
Acque ſtagnanti, mobili criſtalli,
Fior vari, e varie piante, herbe diverſe,

Apriche

Apriche collinette, ombroſe valli,
Selve, e ſpelunche in una viſta offerſe.
E quel che'l bello e'l caro accreſce à l'opre,
L'arte che tutto fa, nulla ſi ſcopre.
Stimi (ſi miſto il culto è col negletto)
Sol naturali, e gli ornamenti, e i ſiti.
Di Natura arte par, che per diletto
L'imitatrice ſua ſcherzando imiti:
L'aura, non ch'altro, e de la Maga effetto;
L'aura, che rende gli alberi fioriti:
Co' fiori eterni, eterno il frutto dura;
E mentre ſpunta l'un, l'altro matura.

GERUSAL. LIB. Cant. xvi. 9, 10.

The garden then unfolds a beauteous ſcene,
With flow'rs adorn'd, and ever-living green.
There ſilver lakes reflect the beaming day,
Here cryſtal ſtreams in gurgling fountains play;
Cool vales deſcend, and ſunny hills ariſe,
And groves and caves and grottos ſtrike the eyes.
Art ſhew'd her utmoſt power, but art conceal'd
With greater charms the pleas'd attention held.
It ſeem'd as nature play'd a ſportive part,
And ſtrove to mock the mimic works of art.
By powerful magic breathes the vernal air,
And fragrant trees eternal bloſſoms bear:
Eternal fruits on every branch endure;
Thoſe ſwelling from their buds, and theſe mature.

HOOLE.

I might ſtrengthen the reſemblance by

quoting more; but it can ſcarcely be neceſſary to accumulate proofs that both theſe great poets were ſufficiently ſenſible of the charms of ſelect and unſophiſticated nature, to take delight in deſcribing it with all the richneſs of colouring and ſoftneſs of pencil they poſſeſſed. Taſſo, in particular, ſeems to have a better claim than Milton to an anticipation of the modern ſtyle of ornamental gardening; ſince he expreſsly aſcribes the beauties he is painting to *art*, but an art which perfectly conceals itſelf under the guiſe of nature—the very definition of that which is employed in the Engliſh garden.

Is it not truly aſtoniſhing that ſuch a man as Walpole ſhould be ignorant or forgetful of paſſages lying ſo obvious to the poetical reader as thoſe above quoted? For had they been at all preſent to his memory, the utmoſt perſonal or national partiality could never, one would ſuppoſe, have ſuffered him to arrogate to Milton an originality ſo little, in this caſe, belonging to him. This example may

ſtrengthen

ſtrengthen in your mind a caution which I think can ſcarcely be too often inculcated—*not to rely too much*, either in matters of fact or opinion, *upon the authority of names*. Very few, indeed, are they that deſerve implicit confidence, and yet we daily ſee it laviſhed upon thoſe whoſe claims are the moſt inconſiderable. Title, wealth, and a certain figure in the faſhionable world, always carry more than their due weight. Even learning is generally much over-rated; and eminence in one point gives a credit in others totally unconnected with it. Every literary opinion that carries on its face a paradoxical air, or a ſtrain of over-refinement, is ſuſpicious in its own nature, whoever be its author, and ſhould be taken to taſk by the free examination of plain ſenſe. How many are there that would ſhrink from ſuch an inqueſt!

Farewell!

LETTER VII.

ON THE CHARACTER OF AJAX IN THE ILIAD.

ALMOST ever ſince I was a reader of Homer, the character of *Ajax* in the Iliad has ſtruck me, among the group of perſonages ſo admirably painted by the poet, as one of the moſt meritorious; and I have wondered that in common opinion it ſhould have been held in ſuch inferior eſtimation. The cauſe, I ſuppoſe, has been, that the general idea of Ajax has been drawn from various other ſources, and particularly from Ovid's Metamorphoſes, where all the eloquence of Ulyſſes is employed to fix upon him the ſtain of ferocious and brutal ſtupidity. The diſcuſſion of a character of fiction is of little importance

importance in itſelf, and I confeſs I have been ſufficiently diſguſted with the air of importance given to ſome of theſe inveſtigations; yet I think Homer's Ajax may afford a not unintereſting ſubject for a letter, eſpecially as I conſider him as the exemplar of a *moral claſs* among mankind, to which ſufficient juſtice is not rendered. This is the very valuable claſs of perſons, well qualified for the ſtations they occupy, and *always ready* to employ their beſt exertions when called upon, from a ſteady unvarying principle of duty, which requires no animation from temporary feelings or particular circumſtances;—a claſs of more conſequence in the real buſineſs of life, than all the ſplendid enthuſiaſts who are the favourites of poetry and romance, and too much ſo even of hiſtory.

Let us run through, in order, the principal events of the Iliad in which this hero bears a ſhare.

The bodily ſtrength and martial port of Ajax, by virtue of which he is placed imme-

diately after Achilles in the military muſter, are not the proper objects of my conſideration, which concerns ſoul rather than body; yet it may be allowed, that in thoſe heroic times, as they are called, they were the qualities which eſſentially marked him out for the poſt of a warlike chieftain. But the firſt diſplay of *character* alſo well juſtifies his reputation. When Agamemnon takes a ſurvey of the confederate army previouſly to the battle in Book IV, he finds different leaders in different ſtates of preparation; but the two Ajaxes (for here their merits are blended) are diſtinguiſhed as having already formed their troops in perfect order to march. The formidable appearance of their *cloud* of infantry is illuſtrated by one of the nobleſt ſimiles in the poem; and Agamemnon, at the ſight, breaks out into a fervent wiſh that all his commanders were inſpired with the ſame ſpirit, in which event Troy could not fail ſoon to ſink under the Grecian arms.

When Hector, in the ſeventh book, challenges

challenges to ſingle combat any of the Greek leaders, Ajax, as well as the reſt, remains ſilent, apparently through modeſt reſerve, till Neſtor's ſpeech rouſes them to a voluntary offer of meeting the defiance. The determination, however, is committed to chance, and the lot, to the great joy of the whole army, falls upon Ajax. He expreſſes a ſoldier's confidence in the reſult, but in terms ſufficiently modeſt; and he deſires the Greeks to pray to Jupiter for his ſucceſs; which circumſtance may ſerve to obviate any charge of impiety that his little commerce with the Gods afterwards may have brought upon him. That he is no favourite with any one of the deities, and neither aſks nor receives their peculiar aid, will ſcarcely injure his character with thoſe who are ſhocked at the injuſtice committed by Homer's divinities from their partialities, which are generally repreſented as founded upon the moſt unworthy motives. Whatever was the poet's intention in thus diſtinguiſhing

Ajax from his other heroes, he is certainly a gainer by it in the true eſtimate of worth, ſince from native ſtrength of mind he performs actions, which in others are made the reſult of a ſupernatural impulſe.

In the duel with Hector, Homer has been ſwayed by Grecian partiality to give ſo decided a ſuperiority to Ajax, as interferes with the leading principle of the poem, which is, the neceſſity of the return of Achilles, as the only proper antagoniſt of the Trojan hero. Ajax, however, not only ſignalizes himſelf as a warrior on the occaſion; his language and conduct are praiſe-worthy. If he boaſts, it is not perſonally, but of his countrymen. "Beſides Achilles, (ſays he) there are many among us able to meet your challenge." And when the chance of battle is clearly in his favour, he makes no objection to the propoſal of the heralds to ſuſpend hoſtilities, provided Hector, as the challenger, chooſes to aſk it.

When he goes as one of the deputies to Achilles, for the purpoſe of perſuading that

that reſentful hero to intermit his wrath againſt Agamemnon, and return to his duty, on finding Achilles inexorable to all the eloquence and offers of Ulyſſes, he breaks out in a ſtrain of generous and patriotic impatience, and propoſes to put an end to their ſupplications, and carry back their anſwer to the Grecians, unwelcome as it may be. His ſpeech is ſomewhat blunt and inartificial, but ſuitable to one whoſe own attachment to the common cauſe makes him unable to excuſe the dereliction of another.

In the battle of Book XI, ſo adverſe to the Grecians, Ajax, after reſcuing the wounded Ulyſſes, is attacked by the whole hoſt of Trojans, with Hector at their head. Jupiter, likewiſe, ſtrikes a preternatural terror into his breaſt; ſo that, throwing his broad ſhield behind him, he ſlowly and unwillingly retreats. But his retreat is like that of a lion from a crowd of foes; and the awe with which he ſtill inſpires the enemy is the ſtrongeſt teſtimony to his valour. The noted compa-

riſon of the aſs introduced in this place, will not degrade the hero in the opinion of any judicious reader. I do not, indeed, think that the poet is juſtified by the uſual apology made for him, that this animal was a more reſpectable object in Greece at that time, than now among us; for in fact, the circumſtances dwelt upon in the deſcription are his greedineſs for food, and his inſenſibility to blows, qualities in their own nature ignoble. But it is Homer's manner to be very little nice in his ſimiles, either as to their ſubject, or their adaptation; and he is uſually ſatisfied if they apply to the ſingle point for which he adduces them. Ajax was driven from the field of battle by the Trojans with as much difficulty as an aſs from a corn field by a troop of boys,—this is the whole of the parallel. In like manner, the Greeks and Trojans contending for the body of Patroclus, are reſembled to curriers ſtretching a hide; an apt compariſon for the action of two parties tugging at an object on contrary ſides, which was all

that

that the poet wanted. But this is a digreſſion.

In the ſucceeding combats about the wall and before the ſhips, Ajax is, as he is termed by the poet, the great bulwark of the Greeks, ever occupying the poſt of danger and importance, unwearied in his exertions, and ſolely intent upon performing every office of a warrior and chieftain in repelling the foe. All the other leaders are wounded, or have retired to their tents, and the whole care and toil of the day devolves upon him. He is unable to reſiſt the torrent of attack breaking in from all quarters, yet he reſolves rather to die than yield. As the laſt effort, he takes his ſtation on the very ſhips, and thence beats off the aſſailants. At length, quite ſpent with fatigue, and diſarmed of his ſole weapon, he withdraws a while from the ſtorm; and inſtantly, as if no other obſtacle remained, the firſt ſhip is ſet on fire by the Trojans. It is impoſſible for genuine valour, active and paſſive, to be exhibited in more ſtriking colours

colours; and I believe no hero can be found in the Iliad who ſuſtains a trial equally ſevere.

When Patroclus is ſlain, and the great point of honour is on one ſide to ſeize, and on the other to reſcue, his dead body, Ajax is again called upon, and again takes upon himſelf the burthen of the field. Though Hector and the Trojans ruſh on with the confidence of ſucceſs, and Jove himſelf manifeſtly favours them, Ajax abides by the body of his friend. It is in this emergency, when overwhelmed with a miſt or darkneſs which intercepts his view of the Grecian hoſt, he makes the addreſs to Jupiter which has been ſo much admired for its moral ſublimity:

Lord of earth and air,
Oh king! oh father! hear my humble pray'r:
Diſpel this cloud, the light of heaven reſtore:
Give me to ſee, and Ajax aſks no more:
If Greece muſt periſh, we thy will obey,
But let us periſh in the face of day! POPE.

One of the ſimiles employed on this occaſion, is ſingularly apt and expreſſive.

The two Ajaxes keeping back the aſſailing crowd, are reſembled to a mound ſtretched acroſs a plain, and repelling the waters of a vaſt inundation. This defenſive effort is the laſt martial exploit of Ajax in the Iliad; every other hero being judiciouſly made to give way to Achilles on his return to the war.

Why Homer has choſen to repreſent Ajax as a loſer in all the games in which he is engaged at the funeral of Patroclus, is not eaſily explained; eſpecially as they are of a kind in which his bodily ſtrength and vigour would have fair ſcope for exertion. But having fixed his reputation by making him the reſource of his countrymen on all ſerious occaſions, it is of little conſequence that others ſurpaſs him in ſportive conflicts.

Such is the Ajax of the Iliad;—a hero (as far as ſo rude an age admits of heroiſm) *in grain*; tried and proved by every difficulty and danger; not the meteor of a day, but, ſhining with equal luſtre through the whole period of action; always

ways in his place; reſorted to on every emergency, and never in vain; not hurried along by idle bravado or enthuſiaſtic ardour, but making utility the guide of his exertions; finally, never yielding but when mortal reſiſtance was unavailable, and when a heaven-born champion, with celeſtial aid, was neceſſary to turn the tide of fortune. He may then ſtand at the head of *able* and *uſeful* men, whoſe value is ſuperior to their fame;—a claſs of which there are members in every profeſſion and rank of life, and to whoſe aſſiſtance the firſt-rate characters owe great part of their celebrity and ſucceſs.

Such was the Antipater of Philip of Macedon, of whom the latter, when reproached for his late riſing, ſaid, "I ſlept, becauſe I knew Antipater was awake;"—who, while Alexander the Great was rambling he ſcarcely knew whither, and acting the conqueror among effeminate Aſiatics, held the reins of warlike Greece; quaſhed the revolt of the generous Agis, and continually ſupplied his maſter with freſh bodies

dies of diſciplined ſoldiers. Such was the Labienus of Cæſar, the Agrippa of Auguſtus, the Sully of Henry IV, the Cecil of Elizabeth, the Ireton of Cromwell Such appear to be the generality of thoſe officers in the Britiſh navy, under whoſe conduct the empire of the ocean has been maintained for their country every where, againſt all foes, by dint of equal valour and unvarying ſkill. In ſcience, in the arts, in the common buſineſs of life, ſuch men might be pointed out. In general, they are thoſe whom the leaders in important affairs would chooſe for their ſeconds, to ſupply their places on occaſion, act according to their plans, and take the management of ſeparate and dependent parts. Their eſſential qualifications are, a perfect fitneſs for their poſts, and a conſtant readineſs to bring all their powers into full exertion,—firmneſs, vigilance, order, and the habit of fixing the attention upon particular objects. "Pares negotiis neque ſupra" has been thought but ſubaltern praiſe; but if we be allowed

to

to tranſlate theſe words, by "Maſters of their buſineſs, and not above it," the idea of the character here intended will be adequately expreſſed, and ſurely it implies no mean commendation. The enthuſiaſm of genius, and the creative faculty of invention, do not belong to it; but it reaches the mark of known excellence in what it undertakes. Without theſe Ajaxes, the greateſt geniuſes may be foiled, and the moſt brilliant enterprizes prove abortive. With them, the world will go on well in its ordinary train, and ſteady proſperity will compenſate the want of ſtriking improvement.

LETTER VIII.

ON EVIDENCE IN MATTER OF FACT.

DEAR SON,

In a former letter I touched upon the authority ariſing from teſtimony in matter of fact, and hinted at a few circumſtances which were neceſſary to give it all the weight it could acquire. But as this is a very important conſideration in the purſuit of truth, I think it well deſerves to be made the ſubject of a ſeparate diſcuſſion.

It was the great defect of the ſyllogiſtic method of reaſoning, that requiring a previous agreement between the two parties in a debate, in certain propoſitions whence the concluſion was to be deduced, it would ſcarcely apply to any ſubject on which

which mankind really differed. In conſequence, nothing can be more trifling than the examples uſually given of logical demonſtration, which are little more than exemplifications of the definition aſſumed as the baſis; and if this be diſputed by the opponent, the conteſt is at an end. Mathematical demonſtration, in like manner, is founded upon the acknowledged truth of certain premiſes or axioms, and therefore extends no farther in its application than to things, the fundamental properties of which appear alike to all minds.

But in all caſes in which either the common buſineſs of life, or the theory and practice of arts founded upon experimental inquiry, are concerned, matters of fact are the great objects to be aſcertained; and to draw juſt concluſions from them is leſs difficult, than to ſettle the rules of evidence by which they are to be eſtabliſhed. Give me *facts—well-authenticated facts*—cries the politician, the economiſt, the phyſician, the chymiſt, the manufacturer,

manufacturer, and leave me to make inferences for myself. Let us see, then, what causes stand in the way of this desired authentication; for that it does meet with many obstructions, is but too evident, from the great subsisting differences of opinion in things of high importance to the welfare of mankind.

I shall begin with observing, that either from original differences in temper, or from the different course of experience men have gone through, the very same evidence of fact makes a totally different impression on the minds of different individuals. Some, sincere in their own natures, and having no ends in view which tempt to the practice of deceit, moving, perhaps, in a narrow circle, and little conversant with the world at large, look into themselves for the motives which actuate others; and finding the propensity to speak truth, and the repugnance to falsehood, some of the most powerful principles in their constitution, they feel it as a much greater improbability that a man

ſhould tell a wilful lie, than that a very extraordinary event ſhould take place. Hence they yield an eaſy credit to grave aſſertions made by perſons competent to the knowledge of what they relate; and direct teſtimony is to them one of the moſt cogent of all arguments. Others, who are conſcious of a looſe attachment to truth in themſelves, and of frequent deviations from it;—or, who abhorring falſehood, have yet, in their intercourſe with mankind, been unfortunate enough to meet with it in great abundance; become habituated to ſo low an eſtimation of the value of human teſtimony, that its weight in their eyes is trifling when balanced againſt a ſtrong improbability. In addition to the difference of temper above pointed out, there are others depending on the imagination and the underſtanding. Some find a pleaſure in admitting extraordinary facts and incidents, as it tends to enlarge the ſphere of their fancy, and elevate the ſoul with impreſſions of novelty and wonder. Others, on the con-

trary, ſeem to indulge doubt and diſbelief through a ſpirit of contradiction, and a kind of depreſſing principle. The natural ſagacity, too, which men bring to examination, is very unequal; and ſome detect numberleſs ſources of error and miſrepreſentation, which eſcape the blunter ſenſes of others.

From theſe conjoined cauſes it has happened, that ſyſtems referring for their ſupport to evidence of fact have met with a very different reception from different inquirers; nor does it ſeem at all probable that an uniformity of opinion concerning them will ever take place, in caſes where new evidence is not now to be expected. There appears to be no poſſible mode of bringing a perſon over to the belief of what, after a full examination, he has rejected as incredible, the balance of argument on each ſide remaining the ſame. He will claim for his own ſenſations reſpecting what is, or is not, the object of rational belief, the ſame au-

thority that any one elſe can claim for his.

Acquieſcing, therefore, in theſe unavoidable cauſes of uncertainty, which are entailed upon our very nature, let us proceed to the conſideration of thoſe circumſtances relative to which we may hope that ſome rules for general application may be eſtabliſhed.

When the reporter of a fact has a manifeſt intereſt in cauſing it to be believed, it is univerſally acknowledged that his teſtimony is to be received with ſuſpicion. No one of common ſagacity would take implicitly the word of a quack in favour of his noſtrum, or of a patentee in favour of his invention. But beſides the groſſer intereſt of pecuniary advantage, that of glory, of influence, of diſtinction, in ſhort, every thing in which ſelf is concerned, may excite to falſe or exaggerated repreſentations. Upon ſome individuals, perhaps almoſt upon whole nations, the love of fame operates as one of the moſt forcible

cible of all motives. It will urge to undertakings of the greateſt toil and danger, and produce a cheerful ſubmiſſion to the ſevereſt privations, where glory can be viewed as the reſult. Can it be ſuppoſed, then, that a ſimple attachment to truth will often reſiſt an ardent paſſion of this ſort? It is an unpleaſant reflection, that ſuch a temper, frequently the concomitant of genius and high powers of invention, ſhould ſo much tend to invalidate the credibility of its poſſeſſor, and to miſlead rather than enlighten mankind. It is ſeldom that one who looks to high honour from a diſcovery, will be content with exactly the ſhare that belongs to him, and will not uſe ſome artifice to make it appear greater than it is. He will not only be tempted to claim a priority in the inventions of another, but to add to his own ſome fictitious circumſtances which may improve their brilliance or ſolidity. On this account it has happened, that thoſe diſcoveries which have beſt ſtood the teſt of experimental inquiry, have

been made by men, not only cool and cautious in their tempers, but little influenced by the desire of admiration. Our countrymen Newton and Harvey, may serve as examples of this truth; and perhaps the comparative indifference to fame observable in our nation renders our philosophers better authority in matter of fact, than the more vain-glorious, though highly ingenious and active ones, of France and Italy. I wish our veracity was equally proof against the love of money.

Besides the direct falsification practised by those who have freed themselves from all the shackles of truth, there is a less criminal, but not less mischievous, propensity to misrepresentation, which self-love secretly infuses into the authors of new systems and discoveries, by disposing them to view things in their favour in the strongest light, and to shut their eyes to all that makes against them. In these cases there is generally a half-consciousness of unfairness; but the temptation of removing

removing all objections, and giving a roundneſs and perfection to a favourite theory, is too great to be reſiſted. The ingenious man thinks a degree of partiality for a child of his own excuſeable; and if he ſcruples to deck it out in deceitful ornaments, he ſeldom will, to throw ſomewhat of a veil over its weak and diſproportioned parts. Even where the opinion is the adopted offspring of another, the ſame paternal tenderneſs is very apt to ſteal upon the mind, and prompt the ſame management. I fear, therefore, that we muſt admit it as a neceſſary practical rule, to extend a degree of ſcepticiſm over all facts adduced by warm theoriſts in ſupport of their ſyſtems, whether theſe be originally their own, or have been received with the ardour a ſplendid novelty uſually excites.

The cautions above ſuggeſted refer to a man's *inclination* to be a faithful relator of facts; but there are many more which have in view his *capacity* for it. In the firſt place, without conſidering particular

objects, there is in ſome perſons ſuch a general want of accuracy in examination, and of clearneſs in conception, as renders them almoſt utterly unfit to be the reporters of a matter of any nicety or complexity. They are ſtruck with ſome ſingle circumſtance at the commencement, which dazzles and throws them off their guard, and confounds their perception of all the concomitants. It is upon this foible, which all men have in ſome degree when their curioſity or intereſt is ſtrongly excited, that the exhibitors of juggling tricks and deceptions greatly depend for their ſucceſs, in ſeeming to do what is impoſſible to human ſkill. I have known perſons, not deficient in ſenſe, but wanting in preſence of mind, who have come from ſuch exhibitions with the full perſuaſion that things have been effected which would have been abſolutely ſupernatural; when, upon putting them to a diſtinct recital, it was evident that they had made no uſe of their ſenſes from the

beginning to the end of the proceſs, except as they were directed.

For they in gaping wonderment abound,

will apply to many children ſix feet high, as well as to the urchins of a dame-ſchool. There is ſuch a thing as an appetite for wonders, which makes a perſon meet an impoſture at leaſt half way, and yield up his underſtanding almoſt without a ſtruggle. Dr. Johnſon's obſequious lacquey and pupil, who imbibed all his theoretical weakneſſes, and joined to them the practical ones belonging to his own character, had a very full portion of this diſpoſition, and I ſuppoſe no atteſtations he could make of having ſeen a ghoſt ſtalking in the miſt of a highland hill, would have gained him credit even with his maſter. "B. (ſays the Doctor, in his letters) who is very pious, went into the chapel at night to perform his devotions, but came back in haſte, for fear of ſpectres." I believe I need not inculcate upon you, that where ſuperſtition has eſtabliſhed its empire,

empire, all credibility is at an end reſpecting objects connected with that weakneſs.

The *particular* incapacities of perſons to be adequate witneſſes of a ſuppoſed fact, turn upon their ignorance of the art, ſcience, or buſineſs to which that fact belongs. Perhaps you will not charge me with profeſſional prejudice when I aſſert, that no man can be a competent judge of the action of remedies in the cure of a diſeaſe, who has not in ſome degree been converſant with the ſtudy and practice of phyſic. For want of being ſenſible of this truth, men have deceived and been deceived more egregiouſly in this matter than, I believe, in any other concern of human life. When it is conſidered, that duly to ſubſtantiate the efficacy of a remedy, three points are to be proved;—that the patient had the diſeaſe aſſigned —that he has been cured of it—and that the cure was effected by the means alledged; it will appear that a poſitive deciſion in this caſe is no ſlight effort of knowledge

knowledge and judgment. In fact, nothing is more common than a miſtake in this reſpect among the faculty themſelves.

In one favourite object of your own ſtudies, chemiſtry, I am ſure you muſt be aware of many ſources of deception in experiment, which would entirely eſcape ordinary obſervers. I recollect a late inſtance of fraudulent deluſion in this art, which is one of the beſt examples of the *particular incompetence* of witneſſes I am acquainted with. An apothecary, at a very celebrated ſeat of learning in this kingdom, thought proper to revive the old impoſture of pretending to convert the baſer metals into gold. In proof of his ſkill, he performed an experiment before a ſelect number of witneſſes, conſiſting of dignitaries of the church, heads of houſes, and even one or two lords, in which he gave ſuch ſenſible demonſtration of the production of gold, that he obtained their formal teſtimony to the fact. In conſequence, the univerſity, proud of the poſſeſſion of a chemical philoſopher

loſopher of its own who could do ſuch great things, conferred on him the degree of doctor of phyſic. Hitherto the affair was only ludicrous; but it ended in tragedy: for, ſome inquirers of more knowledge and acuteneſs, having fully detected the impoſture, the poor man, unable to bear his ignominy, ſwallowed poiſon.

Many of the miſrepreſentations with which hiſtory abounds, proceed from incompetence of a ſimilar kind; the writers having from hearſay given ſtatements of things which none but perſons admitted to the moſt ſecret counſels could know, or having made deſcriptions of matters beyond the ſphere of their comprehenſion. Of this latter kind are moſt of the relations of ſieges and battles, drawn up by men of letters in their cloſets, probably from confuſed and indiſtinct memorials, which their ignorance has rendered ſtill more perplexed. A proper conviction of this truth would cut ſhort many an elaborate criticiſm on paſſages in ancient authors, which it is impoſſible to reconcile

reconcile to probability or conſiſtency. The relations of travellers reſpecting foreign countries are ſubject to a great variety of errors proceeding from incompetence. How, indeed, ſhould a perſon, by running through an extenſive empire in the ſpace of a few weeks or months, ignorant of its language, unacquainted with its cuſtoms, and even with the commoneſt modes of life among its inhabitants, new, in ſhort, to every ſcene that it preſents, be able to fill bulky volumes with its population, laws, commerce, manners, military ſtrength, and other curious particulars, without ſnatching every caſual information, however ſlight and unauthenticated, and making up the reſt by his own gueſs, if not invention. From the groſs miſtakes made by foreigners in deſcribing our country, we may form a judgment of thoſe fallen into by our own touriſts when abroad. It is quite enough to truſt the native writers in each.

After all theſe remarks on inſufficient evidence, you will perhaps ſay, What then

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are we to reckon ſufficient? I cannot anſwer this queſtion otherwiſe than by reverſing the preceding negatives, and pronouncing it to be, that which is given by cool, cautious, diſintereſted, and well-informed perſons, not zealouſly attached to ſyſtem or party, and apparently more ſolicitous to inſtruct than to ſhine. Such I hope you will meet with by careful reſearch on moſt occaſions which require you to form poſitive opinions; yet I will conclude with adviſing you, as engaged in a branch of experimental philoſophy, Never implicitly to confide in the experiment of another, when you can repeat it yourſelf;—and, as an inquirer into the facts of hiſtory, Never to be ſatisfied with a ſingle account, when there are others with which you can compare it.

Yours, &c.

LETTER IX.

ON THE CHARACTER OF CICERO.

DEAR SON,

In a letter I formerly wrote to you, I made the character of Pliny the younger the foundation of ſome remarks on the moral effects of the love of praiſe. The general tenor of them was to ſhow, that although this paſſion, indulged to exceſs, might injure a man's reſpectability, and ſubject him to ridicule and impoſition, yet that it uſually exerted no unfavourable influence on the heart. Unlike thoſe ſelfiſh propenſities which may be gratified without the participation of our fellow-creatures, it requires the aſſiduous cultivation of the ſocial connexions, and ſubſiſts by a reciprocation of ſentiments of kindneſs

kindneſs and eſteem. If it impairs the judgment, it nouriſhes the affections. If it diſpoſes to the foible of vanity, it protects from the vice of pride.

The love of applauſe in Pliny ſeems to have been ſimple—without any rival inclination which could diſpute the field with it. In a ſtill more eminent character of antiquity, Cicero, we may contemplate it in a more complicated relation; and the view of its influence thus modified and compounded, may afford ſome new obſervations in the knowledge of the human heart.

Cicero appears to have been nouriſhed with glory from his earlieſt years. The extraordinary quickneſs of his parts diſplayed itſelf in ſuch a manner while he was yet at ſchool, that, we are told, his comrades uſed to accompany him in a body as he went and returned, by way of doing him honour; and that many of their fathers viſited the ſchool in order to witneſs his exhibitions. His Greek education confirmed both his love of fame,

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and the high opinion he had with reaſon imbibed of his own ſuperiority. The Greeks were adepts in delicate flattery, as well as maſters in art and ſcience. A little while before Cicero finally quitted the country, in order to purſue his fortune at Rome, his preceptor in oratory, the Rhodian Molo, being preſent at his public declamation in the Greek language, in the midſt of the applauſes given by the aſſembly, affected a penſive ſilence, which he afterwards explained by ſaying that he was ſecretly lamenting the fortune of Greece, on ſeeing that its only remaining boaſt, its ſuperiority in learning and eloquence, was about to be transferred to Rome.

Circumſtances ſo well calculated to feed his vanity, joined with a natural diſpoſition highly ſuſceptible of impreſſions, may account for that inſatiable appetite for praiſe which diſtinguiſhed this great man. It was, indeed, foſtered by his profeſſion of a public pleader; for it may be obſerved, that all thoſe diſplays of abilities

which are made in the face of numerous aſſemblies, and excite warm and undiſguiſed applauſes, naturally inſpire the love of praiſe, and its concomitant, vanity. Beſides the ſucceſsful orators of the bar, thoſe of the pulpit, as well as eminent actors on the ſtage, and painters and ſculptors of celebrity, have been remarkable for theſe qualities. It ſhould, however, probably be attributed to a remaining groſſneſs of manners at Rome in Cicero's time, the conſequence of recent civilization, that his ſelf-love appears under ſuch broad and undiſguiſed features. Had the ſame delicacy of feeling then prevailed, as we find in modern times, or even in the age of Pliny, his good ſenſe muſt have reſtrained him from ſhocking it by a total want of decorum in diſplaying his merits. Indeed, it appears that he did give offence by an endleſs repetition of the ſame topic, and by the excluſive credit he took to himſelf for the events of his conſulate, in which, his public ſervices, great as they undoubtedly were, could ſcarcely equal

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the unbounded ſelf-applauſe with which in ſo many orations and epiſtles he commemorates them. His requeſt to the hiſtorian Lucceius, that in recording his actions he would not limit himſelf to his own conceptions of them, but would even violate the laws of hiſtory in decorating them with all the ornaments of rhetoric, is ſuch a barefaced avowal of luſt of praiſe in its moſt reprehenſible form, as nothing but the unguarded licenſe of a ruling paſſion could inſpire.

But admiration alone could not fill the deſires of a ſoul like that of Cicero. Feeling in himſelf a capacity equal to any demand, he entered into public life with a reſolution of puſhing forwards in the career of ambition. And as he ſaw nothing to which, in a republican conſtitution, he might not aſpire, he determined ſtudiouſly to improve every opportunity for advancement. The ſituation of Rome at that period, however, threw many obſtacles in the way of a *new man*. In the contention of powerful factions, wealth,

rank, and natural connexions, were of the higheſt conſequence. Cicero, who poſſeſſed neither theſe, nor the next advantage in an empire founded on conqueſt, military talents, was obliged to place his ſole reliance for diſtinction upon his eloquence. This was, indeed, a powerful inſtrument, and no man ever wielded it with more force and dexterity. But the exertion of forenſic eloquence at that time required peculiar management. Attack or defence in great cauſes involved many complicated intereſts; and if, on the one hand, the orator might acquire glory and favour, on the other, he might incur reproach and enmity. The policy of keeping well with the great was therefore obvious to an unſupported candidate for civil honours; and to this Cicero was further inclined, from that timidity and irreſolution of temper, which all his philoſophy was unable to overcome. Theſe defects perhaps are inſeparably attached to ſpirits of finer mould, obedient to every ſtimulus, pleaſant or painful, and receiving every

every impreſſion in its moſt exquiſite degree. Of this extreme ſuſceptibility, his inordinate love of applauſe may be reckoned only a particular modification. We are to view him, therefore, as a man to whom honour, diſtinction, the pleaſures of ſociety, and the comforts of opulence, were neceſſary for the enjoyment of life. Theſe he was to acquire by his own efforts, and they were only to be acquired by ſometimes ſacrificing the *right* to the *expedient*. Yet he had been educated in the principles of virtue, and was ſincerely deſirous of his country's welfare. Hence aroſe that contrariety of motives which, during his whole public courſe, made him fluctuate between different parties and different plans of conduct, but which, upon the whole, well entitled him to the praiſe beſtowed on him long after his death by Auguſtus—"This was an eloquent man, and a lover of his country."

The compliances to which he was led in the purſuit of advancement were, however, by no means trifling or indifferent;

and they will ſerve to ſhew how much more ſerious are the deviations from rectitude, cauſed by ambition, than the violations of propriety occaſioned by mere vanity. To ſecure Pompey's favour, Cicero promoted with all the powers of his eloquence that Manilian law which conferred upon him an authority beyond the limits of the conſtitution, and the example of which afterwards materially aſſiſted Cæſar in his ambitious projects. During the firſt triumvirate he frequently ſupported motions framed to ſtrengthen the undue influence of thoſe party chiefs, and was not backward in defending their tools and agents when judicially attacked by the firmer friends of the republic. Indeed, though his public pleadings are diſtinguiſhed by ſome remarkable proſecutions, yet he much more frequently took the ground of defence; and provinces, perhaps as much pillaged as Sicily was by Verres, had to lament that the eloquence of Cicero was employed to obſtruct them in ſeeking that redreſs which he had by

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ſuch laudable exertions obtained for that iſland. The loſty ſpirit of thoſe times not permitting a ſenator and man of diſtinction to plead for hire, Cicero could not make the apology for undertaking a bad cauſe that the moſt ſplendid luminaries of a modern bar do not ſcruple to make—that he was fee'd for the purpoſe. Abuſe of eloquence in him was the ſpontaneous ſacrifice of principle to friendſhip or intereſt.

The threefold influence over his mind of ambition, vanity, and timidity, may clearly be diſcerned in his public conduct to the very cloſe of his life. On the breaking out of the war between Pompey and Cæſar, it rendered him a tardy and heſitating follower of the party his conſcience approved. It made him, in the opinion of the foes of the uſurping conqueror, unfit to be intruſted with the conſpiracy for his deſtruction, though, from his defence of that action, it appears, that friendſhip or gratitude would not have withheld him from joining in it; and it

finally ſuffered him to become the complete dupe of the flattery and feigned reſpect of the young Octavianus, whoſe artful ſchemes of aggrandizement he ſedulouſly promoted, till it was too late to counteract them, when their object ſtood fully diſcloſed, and he himſelf was one of the deſtined victims.

What a confirmation do the errors of this great man afford of the philoſophical maxim, that true wiſdom and virtue are inſeparable! With intellectual qualities ſuperior to thoſe of moſt public men in any age, he was perpetually diverted from the path of real policy, as well as of duty, by conſiderations proceeding from the defects of his original principles of conduct, and the imbecility of his temper.

Meantime let us be juſt and candid in our eſtimate of characters. Cicero lived in a period full of difficulties to one who wiſhed really to ſerve his country in public life. The ancient conſtitution of Rome, always unſettled and ill balanced, was now almoſt reduced to a mere nominal exiſtence;

ence; and amid contending parties, all factious and turbulent, ceaſed to exert any ſteady authority. Without joining himſelf to a *party*, a man could acquire no conſequence, and without conſequence, he could do no good. Cicero choſe the ſide he thought the beſt, but he was fully ſenſible of its defects. Perhaps the only public point on which he felt entire conviction was the neceſſity of quelling the Catilinarian conſpiracy; and in effecting this, his conduct was uniformly great and laudable. To have been the acknowledged ſaviour of his country on one grand occaſion, is a merit and felicity that rarely occurs to an individual. This, too, was the buſineſs of his higheſt elevation, when he had attained the object of which he had ſo long been in purſuit. It is fair, therefore, to conclude, that had he been born to power, he would have exerted it for the good of mankind; and that even in his moſt cenſurable compliances for obtaining it, he ſecretly reſolved to make amends by his uſe of it. Neither could

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any thing be more pure and exemplary than his conduct as governor of a province. In this ſituation, as well as in his conſulſhip, love of praiſe coincided with duty, and ſtimulated him to the moſt beneficial exertions. Suppoſe him placed in the ſituation of Pliny, a wealthy heir, trained to letters under an illuſtrious kinſman, the ſubject of a government which gave no ſcope to party politics, ſeeing a path open to diſtinction by the eaſy methods of cultivating polite literature and innoxious eloquence, finally, cheriſhed by a virtuous and indulgent maſter, and raiſed to honours which were to be beſt maintained by copying the benevolent plan of the beſtower;—in ſuch circumſtances, Cicero, like Pliny, would probably have had only the foible of vanity, to counterbalance exalted talents and amiable virtues. He was kind and humane before thoſe were properly Roman qualities. He was a zealous promoter of philoſophical ſtudies, while yet they were ſcarcely naturalized to his country. We may wiſh, in-

deed, that his philoſophy had been more a principle of action, than a topic for diſcuſſion; for it muſt be acknowledged, that on real emergencies, ſuch as his baniſhment, and the death of his daughter, it miſerably failed him. But with all the ſyſtems of philoſophy before him, and judgment to chooſe the moſt rational, he wanted a *philoſophical temper*; and Epicurus, whom he deſpiſed ſo much as a ſyſtematiſt, would as ſeverely have reproved his practical weakneſſes, as the rigid Zeno.

With many points of difference, there were alſo conſiderable reſemblances between Cicero and our admired Bacon. Splendid and comprehenſive abilities, uncommon quickneſs of underſtanding, joined with a kind of mobility and unſteadineſs of temper, were the lot of both. Diſtinction was the aim of both; and not merely that which might ſatisfy the ſtudious recluſe, but which might ſhine in courts and ſenates, and command reſpect and authority. Both were profuſe in expence, and involved themſelves in pecuniary

niary difficulties. Theſe, to Cicero, were probably the cauſe of the moſt reprehenſible circumſtance of his private conduct —his divorce of Terentia, and marriage, in his advanced years, with a rich young ward. Their effect upon lord Bacon was ſtill more baneful. They made him unfaithful to his truſt in his high poſt of chancellor, and involved him in ruin and indelible diſgrace. Bacon's meanneſs of adulation and crouching ſervility may find ſome excuſe in the very mean ſpirit of the times, ſo unjuſtly extolled as the manly period of the Engliſh character; but his baſe ingratitude to the earl of Eſſex and other benefactors, ſeems to denote an inferiority in the moral conſtitution of his mind, to that of Cicero. Both wanted firmneſs and equanimity, and were better preceptors than exemplars of philoſophy. On the whole, however, the moral and political character of Cicero ſtands much higher than that of Bacon, who, perhaps, equally ſurpaſſes the Roman in his intellectual character.

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The example of Cicero is unfavourable to the opinion of the influence of ſpeculative ſyſtems over the practice of life, and tends to confirm the notion of thoſe who attribute moral differences chiefly to original temper, modified (but not changed) by early habits, and by ſubſequent ſituations and circumſtances. But this topic would of itſelf lead to a very extenſive field of inquiry, and as I have no preſent intention of entering upon it, I ſhall take my leave.

Your truly affectionate, &c.

LETTER X.

ON THE VALUE OF LIFE.

DEAR SON,

THERE are few differences of ſentiment among mankind which appear more extraordinary, than the different notion they entertain of a matter ſo aſſociated with their common nature as the *value of life*. Not only individuals, but whole nations, if we may judge by the manner in which they are affected by the proſpect of death, feel very differently the attachment to life. If this variation were found regularly conformable either to the ſtate of enjoyment in this world, or to expectations in another, it might admit of an eaſy ſolution; but this ſeems by no means to be the caſe. Either individual conſti-

tution,

tution, or particular aſſociations, appear chiefly to have influenced the feelings in this matter; nor do I know that any certain inferences can be deduced as to a man's fitneſs to live or to die, from the degree of his deſire of the one, or repugnance to the other. As a philoſophical queſtion, however, it is worth inquiring, whether any uniform ſeries of cauſe and effect can be traced in this mental affection; and it is ſtill more worth conſidering whether any juſt eſtimate of the value of life can be eſtabliſhed, which may ſerve for ſome kind of guide in what caſes it may be right to put it to the hazard.

The love of life, and the fear of death, are diſtinct things, though they often act reciprocally or conjunctly. It cannot ſtrictly be ſaid that life is valued, *becauſe* the act or the conſequences of quitting it are dreaded. Life may be clung to and foſtered on that account, but only for the ſake of procraſtinating an evil. But, on the other hand, where life is loved, the privation of it muſt neceſſarily be an ob-

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ject of fear. If Dr. Johnſon's ſtatement of his own feelings may be relied on, he never regarded life otherwiſe than as a ſeries of ſuffering; yet no man ever ſeems to have viewed death with more horror. His gloomy imagination probably conjured up terrific viſions of future exiſtence, which his principles were unable to diſpel. The placid and benevolent Metaſtaſio, who ſeems as much as any man to have enjoyed his being, could not bear the name or thought of death, probably becauſe it was to put an end to the happineſs he poſſeſſed. I will not aſſert, however, that a natural effeminacy of character might not have rendered him unable to endure the idea of thoſe painful and diſguſting circumſtances which uſually attend the proceſs of dying. Johnſon was courageous—he could have loſt a limb, I ſuppoſe, without ſhrinking. The Italian, I ſuſpect, was a coward. Johnſon's dread of death may be termed artificial; Metaſtaſio's, natural.

The value of life is the value of all we poſſeſs

poſſeſs in life. Since, therefore, men univerſally ſhow a ſolicitude, greater or leſs, for the preſervation of life, it may be concluded that they univerſally feel they have ſomething valuable to loſe, either in poſſeſſion or in expectation. But, as before obſerved, this attachment to life is in no aſſignable proportion to external circumſtances. It is ſometimes weak in the young, the wealthy, the vigorous, with numerous ſources of enjoyment courting their acceptance; while it is ſtrong in the indigent, old, and valetudinary, to whom exiſtence might be thought a burthen. The fact is, that here, as in ſo many other inſtances, *mind* is the true meaſure of man, and it creates to itſelf its habitual ſentiments and affections, with little dependence on the world without. It may, I think, in general be obſerved, that the greateſt lovers of life are perſons of a ſanguine temperament, engaged in active purſuits, full of projects for futurity, readily attaching themſelves to new objects and new acquaintances, and able to con-

vert every occurrrence of life into a matter of importance:—on the other hand, the phlegmatic, inactive, dubious, desponding, and indifferent, as soon as the warmth and curiosity of youth are over, frequently become careless about the remainder of life, and rather consent to live on through habit, than feel themselves much interested in the continuance of their existence. They may be sensible that there is a balance of enjoyment in their favour, and that therefore, on the calculation, their condition is infinitely better than non-existence; but still it is a repetition of the same things, and the prospect of to-morrow adds nothing to the petty pleasures of to-day. If this be a true statement, it would appear that *expectation* is the grand desideratum of life, not more important as a stimulus to action, than as a zest for giving relish to the passing scenes. When a man has outlived expectation, it will generally be found that, independently of the positive

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fear of death, he has little remaining attachment to life.

I have converſed with perſons who have avowed a ſentiment of which, I confeſs, I can ſcarcely form a conception;—a ſtrong attachment to exiſtence abſtractedly conſidered, without regarding it as a ſource of happineſs. If this is imputed to a dread of annihilation, neither can I recognize that among *my* feelings. In both theſe caſes, I ſuſpect that ſome acceſſary idea has ſecretly allied itſelf with theſe abſtract notions; and that, from a continuance of exiſtence, the hope of preponderating enjoyment cannot be ſeparated; nor, from its final loſs, a kind of obſcure impreſſion of ſubſiſting gloom and deſpair. Otherwiſe, it would ſeem to me totally irrational, on the one ſide, to deſire an exiſtence, though miſerable; on the other, to fear what is an abolition of every real object of fear. Happineſs has been defined, that ſtate, a continuance of which we deſire; and miſery, the reverſe. What, then, ſhould induce wretchedneſs

to wiſh to live, except a ſecret hope that its lot will be bettered?

——————————credula vitam
Spes fovet, & fore eras ſemper ait melius.
TIBUL.

Hope foſters life in ſpite of ſorrow,
And tells us things will mend to-morrow.

Let us now proceed to conſider the value of life in a practical view, that is, with relation to the care of preſerving, and the motives for hazarding it. We may, I think, lay it down as a maxim, that, direct moral duty apart, there is no object in this world for which it can be worth while to make an abſolute ſacrifice of life. Lord Bacon, indeed, juſtly obſerves, that there is no paſſion in the human mind which will not occaſionally overcome the fear of death. But he only aſſerts a fact; and he would doubtleſs admit that paſſion is no rule of action, for it belongs to its very eſſence to make falſe eſtimates of things. The paſſion for poſthumous fame, for inſtance, in thoſe who do not believe that there will be any con-

ſciouſneſs of it remaining, is one of the moſt prepoſterous principles imaginable; yet it has ever had a mighty ſway in inſpiring a contempt of life, and prompting to extraordinary exertions. Whatever refers merely to *ſelf*, will bear a compariſon with other advantages equally ſelfiſh; but it is obvious that no compariſon whatever can lie between being and ceaſing to be. Mere longevity, however, cannot be the object of living, and the true meaſure of life is not time, but utility and enjoyment: hence thoſe hazards are reaſonable which, if they ſucceed, promiſe an increaſe of degree in thoſe points, more than compenſating the probable loſs of duration. Nor is it deſirable that too nice a calculation ſhould be made in this matter, ſince every generous and ſpirited exertion would be damped by the habit of conſtantly weighing the dangers incurred, againſt the value of ſucceſs. When Falſtaff reaſons ſo ſhrewdly on the comparative worth of honour, it is pretty clear that he does not mean to venture

life for it; and Nym's reflection, "I have not a *caſe* of lives," is a very awkward one to mount a breach with. But though, where a clear duty calls, I would not encourage a computation of the hazard, yet, where the only object is perſonal gratification, not to beſtow ſome attention upon this point is downright folly. The dangers to which the thoughtleſs often expoſe themſelves from raſh bravado, idle curioſity, and the purſuit of trifling amuſement, are unjuſtifiable upon every principle either ſelfiſh or ſocial; and were it not that they generally incur them through mere levity, would imply a confeſſion that their lives are of no value to themſelves or others. Seriouſly conſidered, the ſtake committed to us is great; and they who by their laudable exertions are conſcious of having improved its value, ſhould ſet upon it a proportional advance of price. Sound and active youth, brought up in virtuous habits, and ſtored with uſeful acquiſitions, has an intrinſic value with which few objects are worthy of being

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put in competition; and I conceive it one of the groſs faults of our preſent modes of thinking, that this advantage is too lightly eſtimated. Some remarks on this topic may form the moſt uſeful part of my letter.

In our commercial and luxurious country, where to be rich is almoſt become an object of the firſt neceſſity, dangers to health and life are moſt uſually encountered for the ſake of acquiring a fortune. This is the great prize aimed at, not only by our mercantile adventurers, but by that profeſſion which has been commonly thought devoted to a different miſtreſs—honour. Now I can readily conceive, that when the parent of a large family, after educating his ſons, ſays to them, "I have done for you all in my power, it is now your buſineſs to take care of yourſelves, and exonerate your parents from part of the burthen which preſſes upon them,"—the more generous ſpirits will not heſitate to engage in any bold adventure that may offer, regardleſs of its ha-

zards: and when, in addition to the hope of gaining an independency for himſelf, a youth foſters the affectionate wiſh of beſtowing the comforts of opulence upon thoſe whom nature has made moſt dear to him, there may be true heroiſm in his ſelf-devotion. But as to thoſe, who from cool calculation, ſolely on their own account, prefer death itſelf to an humble condition, I own they ſeem to me leſs worthy of eſteem, than thoſe who by cultivating the virtues of the heart, and the powers of the underſtanding, render that condition eaſy and reſpectable. The latter, in reality, often exerciſe more force of mind than the former. They manfully endure or ſpiritedly repel the ſcorns and ſlights that the others fly from. The ambition merely of getting rich little deſerves the credit of an elevated paſſion. It is rather the loweſt of all the ſelfiſh affections; and objectionable as is the principle "Aut Cæſar aut nullus," it is ſtill ſuperior to "Aut Craſſus aut nullus." The man who avows that wealth is neceſ-

ſary

ſary to his happineſs or reſpectability, in fact, places himſelf beneath one who can ſecure both without that adventitious aid; and that daring, which one might admire in purſuit of a nobler object, is in him no better than the boldneſs of a neceſſitous deſperado. It appears to me one of the great evils of the advanced ſtate of ſociety in which we live, that moderate enjoyments are too little valued, and things only of the higheſt reliſh will pleaſe our pampered and vitiated appetites. Amuſement has changed to diſſipation, convenience to luxury, elegance to ſplendour. Ideas of opulence have paſſed all bounds of modeſt computation, and the wealth of a province is ſcarcely enough for the ſchemes of a London counting-houſe. "Quos non Oriens, non Occidens ſatiaverit." Hence it has happened that the ſtrong ſtimulus of cupidity has overcome the tendency to ſloth and effeminacy which habits of indulgence would otherwiſe have foſtered; and toils and dangers are incurred with an indifference, or rather an ardour, which would

would ſurpriſe an obſerver not aware of the force of motives. But in this I ſee nothing praiſe-worthy, while ſelfiſh gratification is as much the object of the enterpriſing ſchemer, as of the indolent voluptuary. The peace and happineſs of the world are certainly not promoted by it; for men who graſp ſo widely cannot fail of coming in each other's way; and never was there a time in which the "multis utile bellum" was ſo conſpicuous as the preſent. Thus, courage, induſtry, patience, perſeverance, and ſome of the nobleſt qualities of the mind, are debaſed by their application. The Spaniſh nation, on the firſt diſcovery of America, abounded in ſimilar perverſions of great talents and undaunted efforts. Thouſands of adventurers periſhed by diſeaſe or the ſword,—their place was ſupplied by other thouſands ruſhing to ſimilar hazards; but gold, gold, was the baſe object in all; and the practice of high virtues (if ſo they could be called) left the ſoul as mean as ever.

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I am well aware that ſuch a concurrence of circumſtances as now ſways the public mind is, in the general view, irreſiſtible. Yet to an individual, who has been early trained to a proper uſe of life, has acquired a reliſh for its cheap and rational pleaſures, and a habit of eſtimating things according to his own feelings, not the opinion of the world—a juſt ſenſe of the value of exiſtence may be uſefully called in—not to make a coward of him, but to prevent raſh and inconſiderate hazards, not juſtified by the purpoſe.

There is one object for which dangers are frequently undergone, which I am ſenſible I could not myſelf have reſiſted in my youth, and which therefore I have no right to condemn in another. This is, the gratification of curioſity by viſiting foreign and diſtant countries. Curioſity may be little more than a puerile emotion; and we too often ſee it exerciſed upon mere trifles. But when decorated with the impoſing titles of love of knowledge, the ſtudy of nature and of mankind, and when

when methodized by preciſe topics of inquiry, of confeſſed uſe and importance, it acquires a degree of reſpectability that gives it a high rank among the motives to exertion and enterprize. Who can but regard with admiration the miſſionaries of the Linnæan ſchool, after a preparation of liberal ſtudies and habits of temperance and activity, dividing among them the moſt remote regions of the globe, for the purpoſe—not of bringing home gold and diamonds—but of enriching their minds with new ideas of creation, and benefiting the whole civilized world by ſcientific improvements and uſeful diſcoveries. In ſuch a courſe of purſuit, an ardent lover of nature lives many years in one; and I know not how by figures to eſtimate the value of what he obtains, compared with that of what he relinquiſhes. If the true meaſure of time is the quantity of ideas that paſs through the mind, I can conclude, from my own little experience, that a ſhort ſpace of active exertion amid ſcenes of novelty and intereſt, will overbalance

balance long periods of inſipid ſameneſs. Should opportunities of indulging a paſſion of this kind offer themſelves, it would ſcarcely be my advice to quell the paſſion on account of the hazard, but rather, by all prudential means, to reduce the hazard within as moderate limits as poſſible. It is to be remembered that the value of life is in fact augmented by thus opening freſh ſources of uſefulneſs and enjoyment, and therefore its preſervation becomes a matter of greater importance. In the narrations of voyages and travels we often meet with ventures made on trifling occaſions, which deſerve no other name than that of culpable raſhneſs. Let grand and leading objects be kept in view, and purſued fully and fairly, but with the exerciſe of a prudent ſelf-denial reſpecting incidental objects of amuſement or curioſity.

But, after all, how many are there who, with a ſcanty proviſion of the goods of fortune, are able, by a due improvement of their mental faculties, at home, and in tranquillity, to paſs through a long courſe

of

of years, without finding life burthenſome? Innocence and contentment—active purſuits during the ſeaſon of activity, and philoſophical contemplation when that is paſt—will render life a valuable bleſſing, till diſeaſe or decrepitude looſens the bonds of our attachment to it, and nature grants the diſmiſſion ſhe has finally provided for all created beings.

Farewell!

LETTER XI.

ON THE RESPECT DUE TO SUPERIORS.

DEAR SON,

At a time when, on the one hand, extravagant notions of equality have endangered the exiſtence of civilized ſociety, and, on the other, arrogant claims of ſuperiority are maintained to a degree ſubverſive of all the principles of civil liberty, it may ſeem a delicate and hazardous matter to touch upon a ſubject ſo involved in party prejudice as that announced for the preſent letter. But conſiderations of this kind have little weight with me in the choice of topics on which to exerciſe free and manly diſcuſſion. On the contrary, the more intereſting they are rendered by temporary circumſtances, the

the more they appear to me to demand that temperate examination, whence uſeful rules may be derived for the conduct of thoſe in whoſe welfare we are moſt concerned.

That reſpect is to be paid to ſuperiors, is a moral maxim of all ages and countries; but, like many others equally general, it has been laid down with ſo little accuracy, as to leave the rule of duty extremely lax and uncertain. Nor is it one of thoſe caſes in which inaccuracy is rendered harmleſs by an univerſal propenſity in mankind to exceed on one ſide only; for it has always been found, that they who are called upon to *pay* this reſpect, are as prone to ſurpaſs the bounds of reaſon in granting, as in withholding their homage. Man is as apt to crouch, as to domineer; and the more one of theſe is practiſed by part of the ſpecies, the more will the other be, by the other part; nay, the ſame individuals are often diſtinguiſhed for both theſe qualities.

Our ſubject cannot be correctly treated, without

without firſt laying down preciſe ideas of the two leading words, *reſpect*, and *ſuperior*.

Reſpect, honour, deference, are terms of double ſignification: they refer both to exterior actions, and to internal emotions. The former, being ſpontaneous, may be made the object of poſitive precept; the latter, being involuntary, cannot. It is true, that ſentiments may be a criterion to a man's ſelf whether his modes of thinking are right or depraved; but the ſentiments cannot be commanded. A ſon may be ſhocked at diſcovering that he is void of affection to a father; but it is in vain that he would force himſelf to love his father, until the circumſtances which have alienated his affection be done away. It is therefore to be ſuppoſed, that the authors of the precept of reſpecting ſuperiors meant only to enjoin what was practicable; namely, the exterior tokens of reſpect, which a man may compel himſelf to pay, though ever ſo contradictory to his feelings. And this interpretation will

appear the more neceſſary, when it is conſidered, that the perſons in favour of whom this homage is claimed, are often ſuch as by no moral rule can be entitled to the homage of the heart. Who could feel inward reſpect for a Nero on the throne, or a Jeffries on the bench, except one incapable of feeling the enormity of their crimes? Macbeth is made to expreſs his ſenſe of the difference of theſe two kinds of homage in terms ſo pathetic, that could a tyrant deſerve pity, he muſt obtain it.

———that which ſhould accompany old age,
As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends,
I muſt not look to have; but in their ſtead,
Curſes, not loud, but deep, mouth honour, breath,
Which the poor heart would fain deny, and dare not.

I do not mean, however, to inſinuate that all the marks of external reſpect muſt be feigned or adulatory. I would only repreſent them as the current coin, or rather paper money of ſociety, which poſſeſſes a conventional value, and is not computed according to intrinſic worth.

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But to whom is this payment due? Who are the ſuperiors for whom reſpect is demanded?

Men are ſuperior to their fellow-men in a variety of modes; in qualities of mind and body, in birth, rank, fortune, and condition of life. Some of theſe differences, however, do not entitle the poſſeſſors to reſpect, though a man of ſenſe will always recognize and properly eſtimate them. Such are, ſuperior degrees of ſtrength, vigour, beauty, and health, which we admire without conceiving ourſelves obliged to treat with homage. Superior endowments of the mind excite in us a ſenſation more akin to reſpect, though it is the uſe of them alone which ought to make them really reſpected. Moral excellence demands a reſpect of a peculiar kind; pure, affectionate, heart-felt, far beyond the expreſſion of complimentary forms. Yet it would be well, perhaps, if in this inſtance, along with the internal ſentiment, the external tokens were more commonly united, that virtue might aſ-

ſume a viſible dignity, unconnected with rank and fortune. One would wiſh not only the philoſopher captivated with her beauties, but the vulgar eye made ſenſible of them by ſome honorary appendage.

In all ſtates of ſociety, however, reſpect has been attached to ſuperiority of a leſs elevated ſpecies; and it is the foundation and extent of this, that we are peculiarly to conſider. Its foundation, as a matter of duty, can only be that of moral duty in general, namely, the principle of utility. This points out the advantage of providing an eaſy payment for benefits, a cheap incentive to future ſervices, and a decoration for high and important offices, which may ſtrengthen the bands of government by the aid of public opinion.

The firſt remark which this view of the ſubject ſuggeſts is, that in thoſe caſes in which payment of another kind for ſervices public or private is exacted, that of reſpect cannot juſtly be required. All the arts and employments that are practiſed for gain ſeem to be in this predicament.

ment. Their value to ſociety is great; but gain being the price ſtipulated by their profeſſors, they have no right to demand more. Of this conſequence ſome of the ancients were ſo ſenſible, that preferring honour to pecuniary emolument, they refuſed to receive the latter as the reward of their labours, in order that they might preſerve a full title to the former. Thus, the pleaders and advocates of Rome for a long period took no fees of their clients, but were content to ſtand towards them in the relation of *patron*, which was a highly reſpected character. On the contrary, the man of firſt-rate abilities at a modern bar, who exacts an extravagant price for his exertions, remains rather the obliged perſon, and his client is not his debtor, but his hirer. The ſame may be ſaid of the phyſician who cures us *for pay*, the ſoldier who defends us *for pay*, and a long et cætera.

There are three deſcriptions of perſons whom all nations have concurred in treating with reſpect; parents, ſeniors, and

magiſtrates. It will be important to our purpoſe to diſcuſs their ſeveral pretenſions.

Parents are by nature conſtituted our firſt and greateſt benefactors, our guides, inſtructors, and protectors; whence a long debt of obligation is incurred to them, for which reſpect is the juſt and natural return. *Reverence thy parents* is a leading article in the moral code of all mankind; and it has been made to include almoſt every ſpecies of deference that one mortal can with propriety pay to another. In various countries, the parental relation has been regarded as the ſource of all other authority; and ſome of the moſt abſolute ſovereigns of the earth command only under the metaphorical character of the *great parent* of their people. I will not aſſert, that in laying the foundation of this kind of reſpect there may not have been undue advantage taken of the power of early prejudice, and the habit of ſubmiſſion; and I can readily admit, that the manner in which the parental duties are performed

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is more to be regarded than the circumſtance of parentage itſelf. Yet I believe it is, on the whole, beneficial to mankind, that the rigorous eſtimate of obligation, and the abſolute indifference to the parental and filial relations abſtractedly conſidered, which are ſo ſtrongly inculcated by a modern ſchool of philoſophy, are precluded by the diſpoſition of nature; and that the proceſs of loving, honouring, and obeying, is commenced in the child, before his calculating powers are fully opened. Without having recourſe to the community of blood, or any fanciful principle, I think that of utility is ſufficient to juſtify nature for having eſtabliſhed, by the moſt powerful aſſociations, that reciprocation of ſentiment between two beings, ſo nearly connected in intereſt, which is never broken without a moral injury to one or both. Even where the parental duties are transferred to another, though *authority* properly goes with them, it is by no means deſirable that all ties of reſpect and affection ſhould be diſſolved.

The reſpect to *ſeniority* is manifeſtly derived from that paid to parents. Perſons accuſtomed to reverence age in their own families, naturally transferred the ſentiment to age wherever they met with it; and even the denominations of father and ſon have in moſt countries been employed as the medium of addreſs between the young and the old. It is an affecting ſtroke of nature in the Iliad, that the fierce Achilles is firſt moved to regard Priam with compaſſion by being reminded of his own father; and though ſuch cruel foes, the endearing appellations of father and ſon paſs between them as ſoon as their hearts are ſoftened by recollected tenderneſs. A ſource of reſpect to age, connected with the former, has been the opinion of ſuperior wiſdom attached to the experience of a long life; whence, in every rude ſtate of ſociety, the ſeniors of the community have been its counſellors and directors, and the younger part have been content to execute what the ſenate or aſſembly of old men have decreed.

Among

Among the North American Indians this order of things is ſtill very conſpicuous; and moſt of the functions of magiſtracy exerciſed in their looſe ſtate of political coherence fall to the ſhare of the elders. In proportion as ſocieties become more poliſhed, and artificial inſtitutions take place of natural ones, the management of affairs comes into the hands of wealth, influence, and ability, rather than of age; and the infirmities of age ſoon coming to overbalance its advantages, it loſes much of its relative importance, and conſequently, of its reſpect. The Athenians reverenced age leſs than the Spartans, becauſe the advanced ſtate of knowledge, and eſpecially of political ſcience, among them, rendered abilities a greater requiſite in their ſyſtem than length of years.

The reſpect univerſally paid to *magiſtrates*, evidently has its ſource in that ſenſe of utility on which magiſtracy itſelf is founded. The power and authority with which the magiſtrate is inveſted, naturally inſpire a reverence for his perſon; and as

power, when not the reſult of direct force, has its beſt ſupport in public opinion, it is proper that all the external marks of reſpect ſhould be employed to enforce that ready ſubmiſſion which is eſſential to the regular adminiſtration of government. There cannot, therefore, be a more ſalutary rule, than that every lawful magiſtrate, in the exerciſe of his charge, ſhould be treated with all the honorary diſtinctions of ſuperiority; and it is one of the evils of great opulence and artificial manners, that other claims are apt to intercept and obſcure the honours which magiſtracy ought to receive. The dignity of a magiſtrate is that of the community; and upon the pureſt principles of civil authority, it ought to take place of every other perſonal diſtinction. The ſtory is well known of the Roman conſul, who, being met by his father, (a perſon of high rank, as well as ſtanding to him in a relation held ſo peculiarly ſacred at Rome) obliged him to pay the honour due to the firſt magiſtrate of the republic, before he

ſhewed

ſhewed him the reſpect of a ſon to a father; and was applauded by his father for ſo well underſtanding the dignity of his ſtation.

This mode of conſidering the ſubject, however, points immediately to the difference between the public and private capacity of the *public man*, or magiſtrate. While engaged in the functions of his office, though perſonally ever ſo mean, contemptible, or even infamous, he ſhould receive the diſtinction annexed to that office. But when he ſteps out of it, he is a private man, and muſt depend upon his own merits or demerits for his reception in ſociety. A judge on the bench, as the perſonified juſtice of his country, can ſcarcely be treated with too much ceremonious reſpect; but it would be abſurd for him to require the ſame deference at a ball or a horſe-race. It is a matter of ſome nicety to determine how far this deference ſhould be carried, when the magiſtrate intermixes with the proper buſineſs of his function what does not belong

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to it; as when opinions are advanced from the bench upon topics foreign to the matters in deciſion there, and with regard to which the ſpeaker is groſsly ignorant. Such a caſe is not unlikely to happen, when perſons of ordinary capacity and narrow education arrive at dignities for which they are only partially qualified, and which fill them with ſelf-conceit. Under theſe circumſtances, a lover of order will not petulantly expoſe frailties unfortunately too conſpicuous; yet it cannot be expected, on the other hand, that folly and preſumption ſhould always eſcape animadverſion, merely becauſe they are diſplayed from an elevated place.

It is principally with regard to magiſtrates that reſpect to ſuperiors has been inculcated as a kind of religious duty. "Fear God and honour the King" have been made conjunct precepts; and ſubmiſſion of every kind to the higher powers has been a favourite doctrine with all teachers eſtabliſhed by the ſtate. The doctrine is not to be blamed when ſuch

powers

powers have originally emanated from their proper ſource, and are exerciſed within the limits of their truſt. But it ſhould never be forgotten, that the reſpect enjoined belongs to the *office* alone, and is founded on the public good as connected with that office: it will not, therefore, juſtify an enthuſiaſtic attachment to the *perſon* of a magiſtrate, diſtinct from his official character. The principle of *loyalty*, as it has been uſually employed to inſpire a blind and paſſionate attachment to the perſon of a monarch, independently of the mode in which he executes his truſt, is a principle equally abſurd and miſchievous, and at variance with every ſound notion of the authority of civil government. As, indeed, he is a permanent magiſtrate, he has a permanent claim to all the marks of external reſpect appertaining to his high ſtation; but he has no title to internal reverence, or devotion to his intereſts *as a man*, unleſs he has merited them by his virtues. Loyalty, underſtood as a conſtitutional attachment

attachment to the regal office, is a juſt and rational principle under a lawful monarchy; but courts have ſeldom been ſatisfied with ſo cool and philoſophical a regard, which might be ſhared with other branches of a ſtate. The loyaliſts of the paſt age compared their ſentiments for the monarch, with their devotion to their God, and their miſtreſs. The firſt part of the compariſon is not to be juſtified, unleſs a community of attributes could be proved between the heavenly and earthly potentate. The latter part may be reckoned tolerably exact; ſuch a romantic paſſion being in both caſes grounded upon a fanciful eſtimate of the value of its object, which ſpurns the controul of reaſon.

Beſides the kinds of ſuperiority above mentioned, to which reſpect is commonly enjoined, there are others for which, in the intercourſe of ſociety, it is habitually claimed, though it ſeems leſs eaſy to ſubſtantiate their claims by argument. Theſe are, the diſtinctions of birth, rank, and opulence. In every advanced ſtate of ſociety,

ſociety, great inequalities of property and influence will ariſe, and the members of the community will come to be diſtinguiſhed into higher and lower claſſes, formed by a compariſon of advantages merely perſonal, and independent on laws and poſitive inſtitutions. The higher claſſes will neceſſarily form the minority, the latter, the majority of the community. Now, the former, conceiving themſelves, with regard to the latter, in the light of a tempting prey, have never thought that they were ſufficiently ſecured by the ſtrongeſt barriers of law and public force. They have therefore ſought to engage in their favour every principle derived from habit and prejudice; and they would have the poor man not only intimidated by penalties, or reſtrained by a ſenſe of juſtice, from invading the property of his rich neighbour, but ſo trained up to awe and reſpect for him, as to feel a reverence for every thing connected with him. This effect has been aided by the practice, ſo general in monarchical countries, of beſtowing

ſtowing *titles*, which eſtabliſh a real difference in what is called *rank*, though unconnected with the exerciſe of civil authority. With this addition, wealth becomes poſſeſſed not only of the power of commanding external gratifications, but of a legal claim to thoſe honorary diſtinctions in ſociety, which are to ſome minds more flattering than any thing elſe that riches can beſtow. As, however, it is not very obvious that the poſſeſſion of one advantage ſhould of itſelf confer a right to all others, a principle of public utility has been called in to give a ſanction to this additional ſource of inequality among members of the ſame community. This is, the neceſſity of *ſubordination*, or a *gradation of ranks and conditions* in the ſocial ſtate. The principle, however, in a country like ours, is here falſely applied; for, excepting the peerage, which, as a peculiar part of the conſtitution, is properly diſtinguiſhed by certain privileges, all other diſtinctions made by title are merely nominal, and no other right is conferred by them,

them than the honour of precedency on ceremonial occaſions. That real ſubordination which enjoins *obedience* to every ſuperior in rank, and of which we ſee an example in the military conſtitution, would be ſpurned with indignation by the independent Engliſhman, if attempted to be put in force againſt him by one, however elevated in title, who was not inveſted with magiſterial authority. It ſeems, therefore, to be tacitly admitted among us, that title is a mere decoration, which individuals are left at liberty to regard as they think proper, and which can only command reſpect when obtained by means which imply perſonal merit. *Wealth* has, if poſſible, ſtill leſs claim to be honoured for its own ſake. The actual power it conveys is abundantly ſufficient, along with its other advantages, to repay the poſſeſſor for any benefits he may have afforded his country in the proceſs of acquiring it; and they who hope to ſhare in it through the ſpontaneous favour of the rich man, are but too apt to court

that favour by a homage carried to the borders of ſervility. Nothing can be more unneceſſary, in a country where wealth is paramount to almoſt every other diſtinction, than to inculcate an artificial reſpect for it. The pains taken to inſtruct a charity-child in the duty of bowing to a fine coat, are quite ſuperfluous, when he ſees his maſter bow as low to its wearer, and ſtrive to ingratiate himſelf by all the arts of fawning ſubſerviency.

As the claim of *birth* to reſpect is included under thoſe of wealth and title, it does not require any particular diſcuſſion; for it would be whimſical indeed to grant to the inheritors of theſe qualifications more than was granted to the original poſſeſſors. Length of time cannot make that venerable which was not ſo in its origin. Whether the proprietor of an eſtate be the firſt or the twentieth of the race, the connexion of the name with the land is preciſely the ſame ground of diſtinction, with this difference alone, that if acquired by perſonal merit in the firſt inſtance,

inſtance, that is all loſt in the progreſs. Antiquaries and heralds may beſtow their veneration on long lineages, to be traced only in manors and lordſhips, or, if recorded in the pages of hiſtory, exhibiting only common men in ſtations above their abilities; the man of ſenſe and ſpirit will reſerve his homage for objects more worthy of it.

You will perceive from the tenor of this letter, that I am a real friend to thoſe honorary diſtinctions which have their baſis in utility, and contribute to the maintenance of peace and good order in ſociety; and it is becauſe I am a friend to them, that I hold in light eſtimation thoſe frivolous or arrogant claims which are their rivals. I wiſh to ſee honour paid where honour is due; but I would have the debt fairly eſtabliſhed and exactly ſtated. There are points of reſpect and deference to which none of the demands of ſociety can juſtly be conſtrued to extend. To make a ſacrifice of moral principle, at the ſhrine of a ſuperior, will

never be juſtified by a friend of virtue: as little will the liberal mind acquieſce in the blind ſubmiſſion of the underſtanding, or the reſignation of the right of freely uttering an opinion on matters which have been rendered familiar to us by ſtudy and education. If there are certain perſons ſo elevated by ſtation, as to render it indecorous to behave with the ſpirit of a man in their preſence, it is fit that they ſhould be delivered to the ſociety of ſlaves and paraſites, and ſhunned by freedom and conſcious merit.

Farewell!

LETTER XII.

ON THE TASTE FOR FARMING.

I DOUBT not that you, as well as myſelf, have been ſtruck with the *rage for turning farmers* that for a conſiderable time has prevailed among thoſe who, from various cauſes, have become diſguſted with their original deſtination in life. Though I know it is not your diſpoſition readily to give way to *rages* of any kind, yet for a letter intended to meet the eye of other young perſons, ſome of them, doubtleſs, more under the dominion of fancy than judgment, I think I may uſefully ſelect a topic which is often decided upon without the conſideration due to its importance, and under the influence of extremely erroneous conceptions.

It is not in the leaſt ſurpriſing that the praiſes of agriculture, which, through ſo many ages, have been rapturouſly echoed by poets, moraliſts, and philoſophers, and are interwoven with the moſt popular literature of every country, ſhould have exerted a powerful ſway over thoſe whoſe heart and imagination are open to every finer emotion. Rural ſcenery, the ſtudy of nature, the practice of the moſt uſeful of arts, tranquillity, independence, moral purity, are ideas ſo grateful and congenial to an unadulterated mind, that a preſumption would juſtly lie againſt the character of that youth who had never diſplayed a warmth of ſenſibility in their favour. But we live in a world in which nothing is exactly what it ſeems; and in proportion to the prevalence of artificial inſtitutions, and what, perhaps, may juſtly be called improvements upon the ſimplicity of nature, the leſs reliance can be placed upon the conformity between appearance and reality. Hence, poetical repreſentations of rural life and manners, which were probably

probably never accurate, are now left almoſt totally deſtitute of truth, and nothing can be more different from the real condition of an Engliſh farmer, than the ideas which would be formed of it by one primed with choice paſſages from paſtoral and georgical writers.

For the ſake of method, I ſhall conſider diſtinctly ſome of the principal deceptions which prevail among the inexperienced relative to this object.

The firſt ſentiment which inclines many to adopt an agricultural life, is *a love for the country*. This is a complicated and ſomewhat indiſtinct feeling, conſiſting of the recollection of pleaſure received from the multiplied ſources of enjoyment afforded by "each rural ſight, each rural ſound," in one, eſpecially, who has aſſociated them with leiſure and fine weather, and enhanced their charms by the contraſt of every diſagreeable circumſtance attending a compelled reſidence in the ſmoke and buſtle of a town. The enchantment is commonly ſtrengthened by fancy-drawn

pictures of the peculiar beauties of ſome romantic ſpot which has been the ſcene of a delightful viſit; and by the remembrance of country ſports and diverſions, which never fail to leave ſtrong impreſſions of pleaſure on one to whom they are novel. With all theſe are blended ideas purely of the imagination, derived from the faſcinating images of poetry. I ſhould belie my own feelings did I deny that in this predilection for the country there is much that is natural, and founded on juſt grounds of comparative preference. What is univerſally found friendly to the health and ſpirits, grateful to all the ſenſes, and congenial with the unſophiſticated inclinations of all human beings, cannot but have a ſolid baſis in the nature of things:

"God made the country, and man made the town."

But the profeſſional farmer is perhaps the perſon who can leaſt of all indulge this ſentimental paſſion for the country, and in whom it is the moſt certain ſoon to be turned into indifference, if not diſguſt.

This,

This, I think, a little conſideration will plainly ſhew.

In the firſt place, his choice of a place of reſidence muſt not be directed by any circumſtance of expected rural pleaſure. Few, I believe, would heſitate to predict the ruin of one who ſhould make a point of fixing in a *fine ſporting country*, between this lord's fox-hounds, and that ſquire's harriers. A prognoſtic not much leſs unfavourable would be formed by a prudent man of the young farmer who ſhould be captivated by a romantic ſituation, amid hills and vallies, with tumbling torrents, hanging thickets, and all the materials of pictureſque landſcape. In fact, no two taſtes can be more incompatible than that of the genuine farmer, and the lover of pictureſque. The firſt, in every thing, follows the *ſtraight line*—in his furrows, drains, hedge-rows, fences, roads, &c.—for this plain reaſon, that it is *the ſhorteſt way between two points:* the ſecond, for no reaſon equally clear and deciſive, abhors and ſhuns the ſtraight line, and would

would rather incur ſerious inconveniences than admit ſuch a feature of deformity into any part of his proſpect. The farmer totally diſregards the ſhades and contraſts of colour in his fields, and, provided he eſtabliſhes a good rotation of crops, is indifferent whether red is bordered by yellow or green. The man of pictureſque, on the contrary, cannot endure to look upon ſquare patches of obtruſive unharmonized colouring, which deſtroy all keeping, and aboliſh that beautiful degradation of tints which is eſſential to landſcape. A rich crop is to him nothing but a deformity, if compoſed of an unſightly material, and the ſober ruſſet of a wild heath may ſuit his purpoſe better than any hue culture can beſtow.

Without purſuing further this oppoſition, it is ſufficient to obſerve, that the farmer whoſe object it is to thrive, will probably find himſelf ſettled on a tame unvaried tract, the ſcanty natural beauties of which will preſently become too familiar to excite the leaſt attention. Indeed

he will ſoon loſe an eye and taſte for every thing of this kind; and whether he is riding through his own grounds, or thoſe of his neighbour, all variations of proſpect will only ſtrike him as they indicate change of ſoil and different modes of huſbandry. Nor will thoſe facts in natural hiſtory, or thoſe grand and beautiful phenomena of the elements, which delight the curious ſpeculatiſt, long give pleaſure to the cultivator, who comes too ſoon to aſſociate his perſonal advantage or diſadvantage with every circumſtance, and loſes that happy vacancy of mind which diſpoſes it to the admiſſion of eaſy gratification. Native plants are to him, in general, noxious weeds; birds and inſects, depredators on his property. He cannot view the maternal care of nature in providing for the continuance and multiplication of all living creatures, without wiſhing that the intereſts of man had been more excluſively conſulted in the economy of things. On the approach of the awful ſtorm, which excites ſuch ſublime emotions in the breaſt

of

of the poet, he only exclaims with Virgil's huſbandman, "dabit ille ruinas —— ruet omnia late!"

What wide deſtruction on its coming waits!

And certainly it is not to him that

——————e'en winter wild is full of bliſs,

when he thinks of the difficulty of ſupporting his ſheep and cattle through a long rigorous froſt, or painfully drags through miry roads to ſurvey his flooded fields and rotting crops.

It may be relied upon, then, that *the charms of the country* are no more a ſolid ground for durable happineſs in the condition of a cultivator of the ſoil, than the charms of a fair face, for laſting felicity in the conjugal ſtate. The former, indeed, have the advantage over the latter of being renovated by the returning ſeaſon after temporary decay; but they inevitably pall upon the conſtant obſerver, whoſe mind is occupied with things of more ſerious concern.

A ſecond ordinary ſource of deluſion to rural

rural enthuſiaſts is the notion of an univerſal prevalence of *pure, ſimple, uncorrupted morals* in the country. They are apt to fancy, that as ſoon as they turn their backs on the town, they get rid of every thing odious and degrading in the human character; and that if the happy plains to which they direct their flight exhibit ſome few tokens of defect, theſe however conſiſt in nothing worſe than ſome pardonable frailties, and the unavoidable conſequences of ruſtic ſimplicity. But, in reality, man is eſſentially the ſame being in all places and ſituations. Every where his appetites and paſſions interfere with his own happineſs, and his ſelf-love with that of others. The village has its rake and debauchee as well as the town; the alehouſe of the one offers as great a temptation as the tavern of the other; female chaſtity is an object of ſeduction equally in both; the day-labourer of the one is as much diſpoſed as the mechanic or manufacturer of the other to neglect his hirer's buſineſs, and make petty depredations

dations on his property; for want and lazineſs are juſt the ſame motives in both. What is the farmer himſelf but a buyer and ſeller; and is it not the leading principle of trade all the world over to buy cheap and ſell dear? Why ſhould there be leſs ſharping at a corn or cattle-market than at the Stock-exchange; are not both frequented for the ſame purpoſe? Some, perhaps, would place a reliance on the ignorance of the countryman, and, without ſuppoſing that his intentions are radically better than thoſe of the townſman, would truſt to his want of wit for becoming a knave. But it has long been obſerved that cunning is a leſſon readily learned by the moſt unenlightened of mankind. It is, indeed, the defenſive armour they employ againſt that ſuperior power and knowledge which they always imagine to be employed in plotting their diſadvantage. Suſpicion and craft conſtantly go together, and they are frequently, though under the meaneſt direction, an alliance too ſtrong for plain honeſty to withſtand.

Let

Let then the raw farmer be aſſured that he goes to certain ruin, if he carries with him thoſe notions of rural morality which ſhall lead him to truſt implicitly to the integrity either of his neighbours with whom he is to deal, or of the people whom he is to employ; and if he has been induced to reſign a town-profeſſion becauſe he finds himſelf not quick or reſolute enough to cope with perſons always attentive to their intereſts, and little ſcrupulous about means, let him conclude, before trial, that he is equally unfit for making his part good againſt ruſtics. It may be added, that farmers, having in general an education beneath their rank in ſociety with reſpect to opulence, are uſually the moſt unfit company for a man of enlarged ſentiments and habits of refinement; and that a very large proportion of them are not leſs intemperate in their mode of living, than coarſe and diſguſting in their language and manners.

A third miſtaken opinion commonly prevailing is, that *farming is a buſineſs*

which

which any one may preſently learn, without having been brought up to it. Why the art of agriculture, which compriſes a great variety of things to be known, and many manual operations to be underſtood, ſhould be of this eaſy acquiſition, ſeems difficult to diſcover; that it is made to *appear* ſo, muſt be owing to the many books on the ſubject, which from theoretical principles, illuſtrated by eſtimates and calculations, deduce ſyſtems of practice applicable to all poſſible caſes, and perfectly eaſy of comprehenſion. The opinion is further enforced, by a common obſervation, that the beſt farmers are thoſe who have come to the buſineſs from trade or ſome other profeſſion. This may have been true when farming was practiſed upon a more confined ſcale, and after a traditionary routine. It might then be an advantage to come to it without the prejudices of early education, and with liberal ideas of the employment of capital in improvements. At preſent, I believe, the regularly bred farmers are in general ſufficiently

ciently enlightened with reſpect to their intereſts. Be this as it may, I will venture to affirm, that no one who takes up the buſineſs from a ſlight acquaintance with it, ever acquires that practical knowledge which will make him thrive, without paying very dearly for it; and that even after he is fully maſter of the principles by which the general culture and the main operations of the farm are to be regulated, he will find he has much to learn concerning thoſe details on which his gain or loſs finally depend. It is a branch of the preceding error to ſuppoſe that agriculture is one of thoſe gentleman-like callings which may be followed with a ſort of half-attention, leaving abundance of leiſure for literary or other pleaſurable purſuits. Such a notion, which is highly prejudicial in *any* profeſſion, cannot fail of being ruinous to the farmer who looks to a maintenance rather than an amuſement from his occupation. If his whole ſoul is not bent upon it, if he does not make it his pride and pleaſure as well as his taſk,

he has little chance for ſucceſs. Whatever the rural life may have been in the early ages of the world, or may ſtill be in happier climates, it is here a life of toil and care and hardſhip. Difficulties are perpetually to be ſurmounted, evils, natural and moral, to be corrected, and minute attention to be employed in order to make the moſt of every favourable circumſtance. No!—let the man whoſe object is an eaſy careleſs life, hazard his property any where rather than in a farm.

The *independence* beſtowed by agriculture is another leading argument in its favour with manly minds. This I ſhall not call a deluſion, as I am really of opinion that it has a juſt foundation. Still, however, the fact requires to be explained and limited. The tenant at will upon a farm which could not be ſuddenly quitted without great loſs and inconvenience, is apparently as much dependent on his landlord, as any one man can by mere intereſt be rendered upon another; and in matters where the landlord chooſes to exert his

power, he is as liable as any one to undergo the galling alternative of acting contrary to his principles, or ſuffering for aſſerting them. This is an evil which, I believe, has been ſenſibly felt by many who thought they had, from education and honourable intentions, as good a right to freedom of action as any who might be termed their betters; and it is an evil which the maxims of the times have a greater tendency to augment than to remedy. Moreover, the farmer's independence, like that of other men, muſt eventually be the reſult of his proſperity alone; for no debtor is independent on his creditor, and no one who wants a favour, on him from whom he expects it. But, theſe circumſtances apart, the farmer is undoubtedly leſs dependent in the general courſe and conduct of his buſineſs, than moſt other perſons who ſubſiſt by traffic. He has no need to ſolicit cuſtomers, for his commodities are ſure of ſale in open market. The public, in reality, is his cuſtomer, and not this or that individual.

If he is well ſecured in his farm, he has no fear of competitors. His neighbours of the ſame profeſſion are for the moſt part friends and not rivals. This, in truth, is a moſt comfortable idea, as it precludes thoſe jealouſies and heart-burnings which ſo much injure the peace and happineſs of moſt other conditions in ſociety.

And now I am upon the ſubject of the *advantages* of the agricultural life, I ſhall mention another, moſt important to thoſe who are diſpoſed to take the benefit of it. This is, that it affords *an unbounded field for induſtry*. Unlike the ſhopkeeper, or the members of what are called the liberal profeſſions, who, though ever ſo deſirous of employment, muſt wait till it offers itſelf—the farmer can always find occupation for his activity and ingenuity. His lands cannot be ſo thoroughly cultivated but that they will admit of melioration; for the *maximum* of culture is abſolutely indefinite. A farm of moderate ſize cannot be kept in perfect order without con-

ſtant attention; and there is not a corner of it in which the maſter's eye, or even his hand, may not be uſefully employed. It can never be a matter of indifference to him whether he ſits at home doing nothing, or beſtirs himſelf. Every walk round his yard, every ride through his grounds, will repay his trouble. This circumſtance, to one who has known the curſe of liſtleſs, heartleſs, involuntary idleneſs, is invaluable.

Every mode of human employment, beſides its ultimate object, which may honeſtly be ſtated to be gain, has an intermediate or proximate object, on which not only the attainment of the former depends, but the reputation, utility, and ſatisfaction attending that way of life. And the only thing that can elevate the mind above the mere purſuit of gain, is to make this intermediate object the great point of ambition. Thus, the lawyer ſhould attach himſelf to forenſic eloquence, and a ſcientific acquaintance with the laws of his country; the phyſician, to the cure of

diſeaſes and the branches of natural knowledge on which it is founded; the artiſt and manufacturer, to the production of what is moſt excellent in their reſpective walks. The farmer's proper profeſſional object I conceive to be, the growth of the greateſt poſſible quantity of uſeful products upon the ſame ſpot of ground. I would have uſed the word *ſuſtenance*, but that ſome articles for clothing and other economical uſes might ſeem excluded: food, however, is certainly the ſtaple of an Engliſh farm. It is not, then, Shenſtone's graceful divinity, Rural Elegance, but Plenty, laughing broad-faced Plenty, that muſt be the farmer's goddeſs. To her every ſacrifice muſt be made; nor need the votary bluſh for her vulgarity when he conſiders her benefits. On plenty, all the enjoyment of man and other animals has its baſis. Give them that, and truſt to their other faculties for attaining the felicity of which their natures are made capable; without it, they pine away in miſery. If ſentiment, then, is

requiſite

requiſite for the farmer, here is room for the nobleſt kind, that of beneficence. He may ſurvey his full barns and loaded ſtacks, his yard crowded with animals well fed and ſheltered, and his thriving flocks and herds, and ſay, "I am the inſtrument of all this good, the father of this happy family. Of the utility of my exertions in the general ſyſtem, no one can doubt: life and its firſt bleſſings are their immediate reſult."

This is the true notion of the honours and pleaſures of the agricultural profeſſion. Here is nothing of deluſion; but herein are implied labour, anxiety, hardſhip, and a thouſand circumſtances little thought of in the youthful eſtimate of a rural life. My object in this ſtatement is not to diſcourage, but to inform; not to accumulate objections, but to correct falſe ideas. This, you know, is all the interference I have uſed with my own children in the choice of a profeſſion. You, I doubt not, as you ſee occaſion, will perform the ſame office towards any friend

whom you ſee in danger of hazarding his welfare by a fanciful experiment. I flatter myſelf that ſome of the topics of this letter may aſſiſt in prompting a rational conſideration of the ſubject.

Adieu!

LETTER XIII.

HISTORY AND BIOGRAPHY ESTIMATED.

DEAR SON,

THAT to a human being no ſtudy can be more important than that of the character and fortune of mankind, may be almoſt aſſumed as a ſelf-evident propoſition. What, indeed, can be ſo neceſſary to all ranks and conditions, as a knowledge of the creatures with whom they are to live and act, on whom ſo large a ſhare of their happineſs is to depend, and from whoſe fate they are enabled to infer their own?

Hiſtory and biography are the great records of man; the firſt, of what he has been and done collectively, the ſecond, of the ſame individually. The limits between

tween the two cannot exactly be defined; for, on the one hand, ſocieties being compoſed of individuals, the hiſtory of the former conſiſts of the actions of the latter;—and, on the other, the actions of individuals being frequently diſplayed in their effects on ſocieties, they cannot be conſidered without entering into the diſcuſſions of hiſtory. This intercommunication of ſubject, however, admirably fits them for throwing light upon one another, and ſupplying each other's deficiencies. Hiſtory, as it has been too much the cuſtom to compoſe it, gives a diſtinct view only of thoſe *great* events, as they are called, which, from their uniformity and ſimplicity, inſtruct leſs in the real nature of mankind, than the ſtory of domeſtic and civil life. Wars, confederacies, treaties, contentions for ſupreme power, and the final triumph of the ſtrong over the weak, fill, with few exceptions, the whole ſpace of the hiſtorical tablet, and the individuals who are brought forward on its canvaſs, and ſupply it with figures

figures of portraiture, are often leſs diſtinguiſhed from each other by characteriſtic marks, than many who remain unnoticed in the crowd. Biography has taken the perſonages of hiſtory, and by painting them as ſingle portraits, has given more exact delineations of their features: but it has likewiſe ſelected many from the groups of common life, and has thereby made a diſplay of human character vaſtly more copious, varied, and diſtinct than is to be found in hiſtory alone.

If, on this compariſon, the advantage ſeems to lie on the ſide of biography, it muſt however be confeſſed, that this is liable to peculiar cauſes of miſrepreſentation, which, if not corrected either by general hiſtory, or by the ſpirit of philoſophy, are extremely apt to miſlead. Almoſt every profeſſed biographer ſits down with the intention of making a *hero* of his ſubject; and not only raiſes his perſonal character above its merits, but gives him an undue ſhare of conſequence in the public events in which he was concerned, or in the advancement of the art or

ſcience

ſcience in which he was eminent. Some, in their groſs daubings, lay on every glaring colour of moral and intellectual excellence to decorate their portrait, without the leaſt attention to nature and congruity. Others, more artful, and therefore more deluſive, only exaggerate qualities really poſſeſſed, palliate or wholly conceal defects, and form ſuch a general reſemblance as a flattering painter gives to draughts which are deſigned rather to pleaſe than to ſtrike.

In biographical writing almoſt every thing tends to nouriſh this fault of favouritiſm. The original choice of ſubject is uſually made from ſome circumſtance of predilection; ſuch as perſonal friendſhip, community of ſtudies, of profeſſion, of party, or country. It is frequently to be lamented that the very connexion which affords the means of accurate information concerning a perſon, gives a bias to the mind of the writer, and unfits him for faithful narration. Such a relation as that of maſter, patron, or benefactor, while it brings the ſuperior within

within the eye of the inferior, can ſcarcely fail of impoſing upon the latter the ſhackles of gratitude or enthuſiaſtic admiration, and thereby incapacitating him for the exerciſe of that critical ſcrutiny, which alone can develope the ſecret ſprings and motives of action, and bring to view the latent diſcriminations of character. Even the ſimple propenſity of rendering a picture the perfect exemplar of its genus, ſeduces an ingenious writer to heighten his touches, and improve effect at the expence of reality.

With reſpect to the groſſer inducements to violate truth, which operate upon biographers, hiſtorians, and the eulogiſts of every ſpecies who receive pay for their labours, it is ſcarcely neceſſary to beſtow particular animadverſion upon them, ſince whenever they are detected they will be held in due contempt, and it is not often that they can eſcape detection. In ſome, indeed, the temptation, or rather obligation, to partiality has been ſo unblushingly diſplayed, that it is wonderful

derful they could ever have been thought capable of effecting their purpoſe. What reader of common ſagacity would look for a faithful account of tranſactions in the pages of a royal or national hiſtoriographer? The office has now, I believe, by the good ſenſe of modern times, been reduced to a ſinecure; but when Lewis XIV. made his unjuſt and oſtentatious expedition into the Low Countries, he actually took with him the two greateſt writers in his kingdom, Boileau and Racine, (poets both, and therefore well practiſed in fiction) in order to record the great actions he was to perform, by means of his generals. The beſt proof they gave of their judgment on the occaſion, was that they never publiſhed a ſingle ſentence of what they compoſed in their new capacity. This inſtance of vanity and abſurdity may be added to the examples of the benefits proceeding from the boaſted alliance between the learned and the great.

The more diſtinct the limits of hiſtory and

and biography are kept, the more likely, I conceive, will each be to be written with purity, and to prove an effectual check upon the other. I cannot, therefore, approve the method of writing ſelect portions of hiſtory, marked as the *age* of this or that diſtinguiſhed perſon. Such an aſſociation gives, indeed, a peculiar intereſt to the work, and aids the memory in referring facts to their proper æra; but it can ſcarcely fail of impreſſing the reader with exaggerated ideas of the conſequence of the individual from whom the denomination is taken. I have often been ſtruck with the ſilent and unobſerved manner in which ſome of theſe great perſonages ſteal out of the world in the narration of a general hiſtory, leaving the political machine to go its uſual round, without feeling the change of a nominal director; whereas the reader who comes to the concluſion of his *age* with its hero, would be apt to ſuppoſe that the whole form of the world muſt be altered, and a new order of things commence with the

date

date of a new period. Neither, in the plan of one of theſe works, can the writer eaſily avoid incongruity and diſproportion. He will think himſelf obliged to enter with minuteneſs into every particular which relates perſonally to his hero, while he paſſes over with little notice the moſt important events of the age, which have not ſuch a connexion. Thus the views he affords of the period will be at once defective and redundant, indiſtinct and minute. Voltaire's celebrated "Siecle de Louis XIV." is one of theſe anomalous compoſitions. Was it meant for a ſketch of the *ſtate of the world* during that reign? —in that view it is trifling. Was it intended to ſhew the riſe and progreſs of the lead taken by France in the politics and civilization of Europe?—it ought then at leaſt to have included the miniſtry of cardinal Richelieu. If regarded merely as a ſeries of anecdotes of the court of Lewis, its title and pretenſions are much too pompous. The fact ſeems to be, that under a kind of philoſophical form, it was meant

meant to flatter that national vanity which had ſo long annexed its own glory to the renown of its favourite monarch; and to ſuſtain the declining reputation of Lewis XIV. by making him appear as the ſoul and main ſpring of a ſplendid and important period. In reality, ſo little did the character of Lewis contribute to form this period, that he lived to wear out all thoſe talents which had entered the ſcene with him; and by conſuming without renovation, he left France as much beggared of excellence of every kind, as it was deſpoiled of power and opulence.

The partiality which has aſſociated the name of pope Leo X. with the moſt flouriſhing æra of Italian arts and literature, has ſtill leſs foundation. His pontificate of leſs than nine years was diſtinguiſhed, indeed, by the munificent patronage of the fine arts, and of polite learning; but the talents which his love for ſhow and ſplendour led him to employ, had already arrived at fame and maturity, and had been objects of the admiration of ſeveral

of his predeceſſors, as well as of the public in general. Though he had the credit of patroniſing Vida, yet his own taſte in literature was degraded by a love of burleſque and low buffoonery, which is allowed to have been injurious to the cauſe of learning, as much as it was derogatory from the dignity of his ſtation. He had probably a purer taſte in the arts of deſign; but the pencil of Raphael was inſpired by genius, working after ſpecimens of conſummate excellence, and not by the influence of "Leo's golden days," which did not commence till painting was brought to its higheſt perfection. The merit of a real proficient in any one of the nobler departments of human ſkill is, in my opinion, ſo much ſuperior to that of a mere patron, eſpecially of one who can beſtow honours and rewards at the public expence, that I cannot but think it unworthy of the former to be put in the train and made ſubſervient to the glory of the latter.

From the preceding remarks I would deduce

deduce the general inference, that in order to obtain a juſt view either of the ſeries of cauſe and effect on which the great political changes of mankind have depended, or of the progreſſive ſtate of arts and ſciences, we ſhould take as guides thoſe writers who have treated theſe topics hiſtorically, without any further notice of individuals than their ſhare in the matter has ſtrictly demanded;—but that to acquire a knowledge of what man intrinſically is, of what he is capable of effecting, of all the variations of his character, and the cauſes which concur in forming them, the narrations of biography muſt be conſulted. On theſe alone, in conjunction with our obſervations of the paſſing ſcenery of life, can we depend for the rectifying of thoſe falſe ideas, which the theories of ſpeculatiſts, and the fictions of poets and noveliſts, are continually obtruding upon our minds, and the combined maſs of which probably conſtitutes a much larger portion of our opinion than we ſuſpect. Every one, even mo-

derately converſant with works of invention, muſt frequently, I doubt not, when ſearching for examples to corroborate moral or metaphyſical theories, have found himſelf recurring unawares to the characters and events contained in ſuch works, in preference to thoſe of real life. But I have already taken occaſion to remark, that no writer, how great ſoever be his ſkill and uſual fidelity in copying nature, deſerves to be quoted as authority in his fancy-pieces, eſpecially in thoſe, which aim at giving pleaſure and ſurpriſe by means of novelty. More deluſive than theſe, however, are the writers who, in order to ſupport a philoſophical ſyſtem, weave a tiſſue of fictitious characters and adventures, expreſsly calculated for preſenting ſuch a view of human nature as may ſuit their prior reaſonings, and derived entirely from ſpeculation, uncorrected by experience. In ſuch pretended hiſtories it may eaſily happen that the whole repreſentation of mankind is as void of truth, as if it had been made for the

ſuppoſed

ſuppoſed inhabitants of Saturn or Sirius; and a reaſonable prepoſſeſſion will lie againſt ſyſtems which dare not truſt their proof to appeals to the world as it is, but muſt invent a world of their own for the diſplay and confirmation of their principles.

Biography, ſufficiently minute, and compoſed with judgment, is the beſt corrective of theſe fanciful pictures of human nature, particularly by the inſight it affords into the circumſtances which from early youth have contributed to the formation of character, moral and intellectual. It will give the true diſcrimination between the effects of original conſtitution, and thoſe of aſſociation, in forming the peculiar bent of the mind; the theoretical diſcuſſion of which may be carried on for ever by the aid of gratuitous ſuppoſitions without coming to a deciſion. Genuine biography will exhibit, on the one hand, ſuch manifeſt inſtances of irreſiſtible propenſities to certain purſuits, and of ſettled caſts of temper, appearing from the firſt

dawnings of reaſon, as muſt convince any but a determined theoriſt, that there are primary and radical differences in minds, which give the leading colour to character, and are capable only of being modified, not changed. On the other hand, it will diſtinctly ſhew, that early impreſſions often exert an influence through all the ſubſequent periods of life; and that principles and opinions are uſually the reſult of ſuch aſſociations as are capable of direction, and conſequently leave ample ſcope for plans of education, and other proceſſes of inſtruction and melioration.

From biography may alſo be learned the fallacy of thoſe analogical concluſions reſpecting the attributes of the mind, which ſuppoſe a neceſſary co-exiſtence between certain moral and intellectual qualities, according to ſome hypothetical notions of their conſtitutional cauſe. This is a copious ſource of miſrepreſentation in the modern philoſophical works of fiction, and one, in my opinion, capable of doing much miſchief. By confounding the

the active and paſſive qualities of mind, they have made the degree in which impreſſions are received, a teſt of the energies ready to be exerted. Thus, paſſion to the verge of madneſs, ſenſibility ſo exquiſite as to become diſeaſe, and uncontroulable ardour of deſire, are painted as the conſtant concomitants of high intellectual powers, vigour of imagination, and all the nobler virtues of the heart. Hence youth are taught to regard as ſymptoms of an exalted ſoul, actions and propenſities the moſt injurious to ſociety and the individual; and to look with ſcorn upon that ſedateneſs and moderation of character, which the moſt judicious moraliſts have accounted the perfection of humanity. But biography not only preſents combinations of qualities which baffle *all* ſpeculative reaſonings concerning the mental conſtitution, but, in particular, it contradicts the falſe analogies above hinted at. In the enumeration of great writers, admirable inventors, active phi-

lanthropiſts, conſummate generals, profound politicians,—of all thoſe *maſter-minds*, in ſhort, who lead the opinions and direct the fate of mankind, I am convinced a majority will be found, whoſe calm and unruffled tempers allowed an uninterrupted exerciſe to their intellectual faculties,—who were men of method, order, and regularity, in full poſſeſſion of themſelves, and capable of directing at will the whole force of their minds upon the objects in which they were engaged. On the other hand, characters of violence, caprice, and uncontrouled deſire, ſo properly termed by the Romans *impotentia animi*, are moſt frequently to be met with among the degenerate poſſeſſors of hereditary power, or the unworthy favourites of fortune, raiſed by ſome frivolous accompliſhments to ſtations for which nature never deſigned them. Or if they are found in alliance with genius and elevated ſentiment, that genius is uſually waſted on unequal and abortive efforts,

and

and that ſentiment leads to nothing but vain reſolutions and unavailing regrets.

Thoſe characters in biography are moſt inſtructive and animating, in which we ſee perſevering efforts overcoming a crowd of obſtacles, and diſtinguiſhed eminence gradually riſing out of moderate beginnings. This is, in fact, the diſcipline through which ſome of the greateſt names among mankind have paſſed; and it may be aſſerted, that none of the original favourites of nature and fortune have attained a ſuperiority ſo ſolid and durable, as that acquired by ſuch a courſe of probation. But it is not from volatile impetuous characters, however active and ardent, that ſuch a ſteady career in proficiency is to be expected; and that kind of rapid reſtleſs genius, which is fired by every ſplendid proſpect, and obtains eaſy conqueſts in every new field of exertion, is rather an impediment than a help in the progreſs to excellence.

The only proper object of hiſtory and biography,

biography, beyond that of mere amuſement, is *the ſtudy of man.* The application of this ſtudy belongs to philoſophy, which is faithfully, impartially, and upon an extenſive ſcale, to make uſe of the materials thus provided. To direct that we ſhould ſit down to the peruſal of hiſtorical narratives with the purpoſe of finding in them the confirmation of certain moral or religious principles previouſly adopted, is to invert the order of rational deduction, and make the concluſion precede the premiſes. Amid the immenſe collection of facts recorded in general and particular hiſtories, examples may be found to confirm almoſt any ſuppoſition relative to the chain of cauſe and effect, and the direction of human affairs, that the reader chooſes to aſſume; but what is acquired by this partial mode of ſelection, except a reinforcement to prejudice, and a ſtock of weak and ſuperſtitious judgments? Some of the leſſons deducible from the knowledge of mankind

kind are tolerably obvious; but many more are involved in a thick miſt of doubt, which can be cleared away only by calm and laborious inveſtigation.

Farewell!

LETTER

LETTER XIV.

ON OPENNESS AND SINCERITY.

DEAR SON,

IT is a trite obſervation of moraliſts, that every virtue borders upon exceſs, and inclines to an extreme, at which it loſes its proper nature, and becomes a fault. This idea ſeems rather to belong to that notion of virtue which makes it ſomething poſitive and abſolute, than to that, which placing its eſſence in utility, denies it a name and character till it is ſanctioned by actual proof of a tendency to promote the happineſs of mankind. Under this latter view, there will be many actions and qualities perfectly indifferent till circumſtances have decided upon their conſequences; and internal prepoſſeſſions for

for or againſt them are to ſtand for nothing without the confirmation of experience. It is, however, obſervable that the moraliſts of this ſect are often as dogmatical in their deciſions concerning matters of obligation as the other can be. Thus, I believe, it is held by a modern ſchool, as a duty admitting of no exception, that we ſhould in all places make our opinions and principles fully known to all who inquire into them, and even induſtriouſly bring them into notice. The practice of the world is confeſſedly ſo vicious, that it may be regarded as unſafe to adduce it in limitation of a moral duty; yet when the appeal is made to utility, I cannot but think that the general agreement of thoſe whoſe conduct is the moſt correct and well-principled, with reſpect to the extent to which a rule of action can actually be carried, is a better guide than any ſpeculative reaſoning concerning it.

The opinion of the abſolute obligation to rigorous, and what may be called obtruſive

truſive ſincerity, muſt, I conceive, have ariſen from a conviction that truth in its own nature is the moſt important of all things, and that it cannot fail of gaining by every diſcuſſion. It is therefore cloſely connected with zeal for proſelytiſm, as well as with ſanguine confidence of always being in the right. It moreover implies a full acquieſcence in the principle, that every degree of private ſacrifice is required in purſuit of the general good. Here appears to me a wide ſcope for practical error, which it will be my purpoſe in the preſent letter to counteract, by obſervations derived rather from my own experience and reflection, than from books and ſyſtems.

For a young man, or, indeed, any man, to ſuppoſe that all his notions concerning men and things, which he muſt be conſcious are continually fluctuating, and many of them founded on very ſlight inquiry, are of high importance to the world, betrays a great degree of ſelf-conceit; as it likewiſe ſhews great ig-

norance of mankind to imagine that maintaining them in all companies and upon all occaſions is the way to procure their reception. But of this he may be aſſured —that ſuch diſcloſure is always of ſome conſequence to himſelf. Nature has made a man's breaſt the ſanctuary of his thoughts. While they are there, they are his own; and however crude or ſingular, if they have no direct influence upon conduct, they will do him little harm. But the moment he gives them utterance, they are his property no longer: they walk the world at large, and may by any one be employed to do miſchief to their firſt owner. Now, what inducement has he to reſign a ſecurity nature gave him? The expectation of doing good? But this ſhould be a reaſonable expectation, founded firſt, upon a perfect conviction of the truth and importance of his opinions; and next, upon a confidence of his own ability to ſupport them triumphantly, and procure their admiſſion in ſpite of the prejudices of his hearers.

hearers. I will not now argue how ſeldom ſuch prepoſſeſſions can be juſt, ſince the fact is, that they are very rarely the real motives for argumentation. An ungoverned love for talking, and an incapacity of reſiſting the efforts of deſign or impertinence to draw forth an avowal of opinion, are by much the moſt frequent cauſes of the hazardous confidences that are made in mixed companies. But theſe are real weakneſſes, and in no reſpect deſerve the credit of thoſe ſelf-devotions to the public good, which at all times challenge our applauſe, if they do not command our imitation. True ſtrength of mind is ſhewn as much in the power of ſelf-controul, as in active exertion, and a yielding diſpoſition is as contrary to its nature as a timorous one.

The proper guard of honeſty againſt artifice and folly is a warineſs of mind which prevents ſurpriſe, and a firmneſs of demeanour which repels attack. The habitual exerciſe of theſe qualities is, in my opinion, ſo far from implying any thing

thing mean or degrading in character, that it is eſſential to true dignity. Let not a fool or a knave for a moment conceive that he poſſeſſes the key of your breaſt, or that a loud impudent knock will make it fly open involuntarily. Every attempt to obtain information concerning ſuch of a man's opinions as he ſhews no diſpoſition to reveal, may fairly be regarded as an aggreſſion, which may be reſiſted in any defenſive manner that does not infringe a direct moral rule. Shakeſpeare, whoſe peculiar excellence perhaps is the force with which he impreſſes maxims of moral wiſdom, repreſents Hamlet as parrying in a dextrous and ſpirited manner the inſidious attempts of falſe friends to gain the ſecret of his conduct. "Take this pipe and play upon it," ſays Hamlet. "I cannot, I have never learned." "Oh, nothing ſo eaſy—it is but governing theſe ſtops with your finger and thumb, and blowing through it." "But I have not the ſkill." Hamlet can no longer contain himſelf. "Why look

you now, how unworthy a thing you would make of me: you would play upon me, you would ſeem to know my ſtops; you would pluck out the heart of my myſtery; you would ſound me from my loweſt note to the top of my compaſs; and there is much muſic, excellent voice, in this little organ, yet you cannot make it ſpeak. Why, do you think that I am eaſier to be play'd on than a pipe?"

Caution and reſerve are generally conſidered as unamiable qualities. Doubtleſs, ſociety is much more agreeable when they are not requiſite; and I ſhould entertain an unfavourable opinion of one who could not diſcard them on occaſion, and give way to that honeſt overflow of ſoul which is ſo delightful in the confidential intercourſe of friends. I allow, that when a man wears armour under his clothes, it is a certain ſign that all is not right. But is not this the real caſe in mixed ſociety? Can a perſon be at all aſſured that through malice or inadvertence his words may not be repeated, probably

probably with exaggeration, in places where they would operate to his ſerious injury? The practice of *eſpionage* is not limited to countries governed by arbitrary power; and I fear many a black tale of treachery might be told even in this country by thoſe who ſome time ago thought proper to encourage an inquiſition into the political opinions of private perſons! I do not heſitate, therefore, to inculcate it upon you, as a fair maxim of moral prudence, never to return a direct anſwer to a queſtion which you have cauſe to conſider as inſidious or impertinent. The mode of averting the attack may be different on different occaſions; but, in general, ſimple and poſitive refuſal to open upon the ſubject will be the beſt. Concluſions will, doubtleſs, be drawn from ſuch a refuſal, but they can be no more than ſuſpicions, and it will ſoon be known who are the perſons from whom nothing can be obtained by improper liberties.

An additional motive for this habitual warineſs is, that the ſecrets of other per-

ſons, as well as our own, are rendered inſecure by indiſcreet openneſs; and none, I preſume, but the moſt reſolute theoriſts, will maintain that the duty of ſincerity extends to the diſcloſure of every thing which has been committed to us under the ſeal of confidence, provided we can imagine that the communication will be uſeful. It ought, indeed, to be a moſt decided and important utility, which ſhould aboliſh the great charm of friendſhip—the ſweet conſolation to a human being of finding a boſom whereon his doubts and fears, his errors and weakneſſes, may ſafely repoſe. Secrecy in friendſhip has by all moraliſts of feeling been regarded as one of the moſt ſacred of duties; and it muſt ſhock every ingenuous mind to think that its violation has been endangered by folly or irreſolution.

No axiom is more frequently repeated, and apparently with more general acquieſcence, than that *thought is free*; but what would become of this freedom did there exiſt an obligation to diſcloſe our thoughts whenever

whenever called upon? In fact, it never has been conceived that individuals poſſeſſed the right, or, at leaſt, the power, of infringing this freedom; but every degree of liberty being odious and ſuſpicious to authority, *that* has not been wanting in its endeavours to limit even this. What are teſts, ſubſcriptions, declarations, and the like, enforced by penalties and diſabilities, but the attempts of authority to get at men's ſecrets in matters of opinion, and rob them of the free exerciſe of their reaſon? How often have the governments of countries even boaſting of liberty, been ſeen to moleſt the quiet and retired citizen with queſtions of ſpeculative right, or of attachment to particular inſtitutions, concerning which it was impoſſible that all men ſhould think alike, though they might all agree in that practical acquieſcence which is the utmoſt that the public welfare can require? Here the ſincere man is often reduced to a moſt diſtreſſing dilemma. A refuſal of compliance expoſes him to unjuſt perſecution, and the

ill-will of his fellow-citizens; and honeſty forbids an aſſertion of what the heart cannot confirm. The dilemma, indeed, is not eſſentially different from that which occurs in ſo many other caſes in which principle militates againſt worldly advantage; and a truly conſcientious man will not heſitate in his determination. It is proper, however, that the tyrannical impoſers of oaths ſhould be told, that when perjury is the conſequence, they are largely ſharers in the crime; and that *they* at leaſt have no cauſe to complain, if they find that a compelled declaration ſtands for nothing when the hand of power is removed.

This is a difficulty which the private individual cannot avoid; but what he may, and, I think, ought to avoid, are thoſe voluntary declarations of opinion, made upon peculiar emergencies, which ſome friends of liberty have haſtily and inconſiderately concurred in. The immediate purpoſe of removing falſe and injurious notions may indeed be anſwered by

by a public avowal of the truth; yet ſuch acts are a kind of admiſſion of the right claimed by governments or majorities to know the ſecret ſentiments of all thoſe whom they may chooſe to regard as objects of ſuſpicion. I would, therefore, as much as poſſible, decline joining in ſuch acts; and, indeed, would make it a general rule to put upon myſelf no unneceſſary ſhackles, but preſerve entire the liberty of thinking which nature beſtowed upon me.

To deſcend from theſe higher and more unuſual caſes—I would obſerve, that in common life no kind of abuſive ſincerity is likely to be ſo productive of miſchief, as that conſiſting in an unreſerved declaration of our opinion of the character, moral and intellectual, of the perſons with whom we are acquainted. That this ſhould ever have been inculcated as a ſocial duty, could proceed only from the moſt extravagant notions of the importance of a mutual communication of ſentiments, on all ſubjects, without exception

or limitation. But of what uſe is it, abſtractedly conſidered, that if, in my frail judgment, I have concluded a man to be a coxcomb or a trimmer, I ſhould let him and all the world know it? Is it not manifeſt, on the contrary. that the ordinary intercourſe of ſociety could not be maintained upon terms which would expoſe every individual to affront and mortification? There is not a man living, every part of whoſe character will bear to be probed to the quick even by a gentle and ſkilful hand; ſtill leſs can it endure the rude touch of one whoſe raſhneſs and ſelf-conceit would moſt readily inſtigate him to undertake the office. Some reſerve in this point is neceſſary even among intimates in order to maintain perfect cordiality; and perhaps in no caſe is it proper to apprize a perſon of our exact opinion of him in all particulars. The moſt entire friendſhip itſelf can demand this degree of ſincerity only with reſpect to objects in which it may produce correction and improvement; but how

how many are the defects and foibles which admit of neither!

Shall we then, it will be asked, suffer any one to believe that we think better of him than we really do? Were I to answer, that this is, in fact, the universal practice, it might be considered as encouraging a dangerous latitude in principle. I shall therefore only ask in my turn, where is the harm of bestowing a little indulgence on that desire of the esteem of our fellow-men, which, when gratified, produces one of the best sweeteners of the mingled cup of life? By permitting a person to suppose that we have not discovered his foibles, we do not prevent his own consciousness of them; nor, by an apparent estimate of his merits beyond their exact value, do we deceive him as to the true grounds of merit. We may even, under cover of the supposition that he has more sense or principle than we believe him to possess, inculcate valuable advice, which would be received on no other terms; and this is the mode that some of the most virtuous characters have

have employed to effect reformation and improvement among the great. You will not, I am ſure, ſo far miſunderſtand me on this point as to conceive that I would recommend the ſame exterior to be put on to all, or that I would on a ſerious occaſion lend aid to the deluſion of preſenting to the public a knave as an honeſt man, or a fool as a man of capacity. I would only deprecate a rigour which, whether the reſult of humour or ſyſtem, tends to ſour ſociety without mending it, and to make perſonal enemies without promoting the public good.

The great value of the virtue of ſincerity is, that when communications of fact or opinion are profeſſedly made between man and man, a perfect aſſurance ſhould accompany them of their expreſſing the true meaning and conviction of the ſpeaker. This is abſolutely eſſential to the purpoſes of ſocial intercourſe, and cannot be too ſtrictly enjoined. If exceptions may be conceived, there is no need to ſtate them; their diſcovery may

ſafely

safely be committed to the urgent occasions which alone can justify them. But the value of a disposition to make such communications is a separate consideration. It may be a virtue or a weakness: it may be founded on rational and benevolent principles, or upon fantastic notions, equally adverse to personal prudence, and the rights of those with whom we are most connected. Sincerity and openness, then, are different qualities. The former is a moral duty of universal obligation; the latter is one of those middle or indifferent things which takes its stamp of right or wrong from its application. To inculcate upon youth an unrestrained openness in the ordinary commerce of the world, would at all times be mischievous counsel, and is peculiarly ill suited to the circumstances of the present time, in which the best intentions are no security against the most odious imputations.

A few words more respecting the generous and splendid maxim of running all hazards for the sake of enlightening and

improving our fellow-creatures.—I would be the laſt perſon to diſparage a motive of action which has ever exerted the greateſt influence on the nobleſt minds, and has been productive of ſuch exalted benefits to mankind. But I would coolly aſk, Is it really applicable to thoſe diſcuſſions in mixed converſation which are the ordinary field of bold controverſy among the young and diſputatious? Does any one go away with a change of opinion from curſory debates in which his prejudices are attacked with rude violence and preſumption? Does not a perſon by raſh diſcloſures of all that is likely to appear moſt obnoxious in his opinions, incur the danger of forever forfeiting thoſe impreſſions in his favour which might enable him to do much future good? Further—in matters which we muſt be ſenſible have divided the ſentiments of the wiſeſt and beſt of men in all ages, is early dogmatiſm either decent or rational? Is not the chance of being wrong at leaſt as great as that of being right, and is not a ſuſpenſion of

of judgment, even though it leans towards ſcepticiſm, better than haſty deciſion? Finally, where the good to be effected, on the moſt favourable ſuppoſition, is very limited, and the perſonal evil to be incurred is very ſerious, are we called upon to make ſacrifices which may be avoided without the leaſt violation of truth or integrity, by mere ſilence?

I ſhall conclude with an obſervation, the importance of which, I am ſure, will be acknowledged by all who have been in circumſtances to verify it. It is, that mere good intention will not prove a preſervative from the uneaſy ſentiment of ſelf-condemnation for any conduct, affecting ourſelves or others, which will not ſtand the ſcrutiny of cool impartial reaſon. Even if the fundamental principle of ſuch conduct be undeniably laudable, any exceſs or error in the detail, owing to heat or inconſideration, will give a compunction in the moments of reflection, ſcarcely diſtinguiſhable from that attending

ing real crime. The violation of prudence and moderation is indeed a ſpecies of moral crime, and cannot be practiſed with impunity by one who ever expects to come to a right way of thinking. This maxim I leave with you, and for the preſent bid you

Farewell!

LETTER XV.

ON THE ADVANTAGES OF A TASTE FOR POETRY.

ATTEMPTS have frequently been made to divide ſtudies into the two claſſes of *uſeful* and *entertaining*; but with little ſucceſs;—for, not only may ſome remote utilities be generally diſcovered as the reſult of what at the firſt view might appear objects of mere amuſement, but the notion of *utility* itſelf, philoſophically conſidered, will claim to be extended to every thing that contributes to our happineſs. The chief practical difference is, that the good or pleaſure ariſing from certain purſuits is immediate and final; whereas others are beneficial only as a medium for the attainment of ſomething elſe.

From

From this ſtatement, the advantage would ſeem to lie on the ſide of the former, ſo that, as I have heard it quaintly obſerved, "the beſt things are thoſe which are good for nothing;" that is, they produce happineſs in themſelves, without looking to conſequential effects. The latter, however, which are in common language called *uſeful*, generally extend their benefits to a wider ſpace, and for a longer duration.

In diſcuſſing the value of a taſte for poetry (the topic of my preſent letter) I ſhall not attempt to arrange this product of human art under either of theſe claſſes; but ſhall conſider indifferently thoſe circumſtances which make it a ſource of preſent pleaſure, and thoſe which have a remoter effect of meliorating the heart, and improving the intellectual faculties. That it is capable of anſwering both theſe purpoſes, will readily be admitted, as a general truth, by one who agrees with me in regarding it as characteriſtic of poetry, that it preſents ideas to the mind

mind not only in their moſt pleaſing, but in their moſt impreſſive form. But in order to give this notion its due efficacy, it will be neceſſary to enter upon particulars.

Poetry addreſſes itſelf to the ear, and to the imagination. The firſt property I conſider as equally eſſential with the ſecond to genuine poetry, though its value may be inferior. Without attempting to ſupport any theory of the pleaſure derived from that modulation of ſyllables in which verſification conſiſts, I may aſſume it as a fact that ſuch meaſured arrangement is univerſally agreeable to the human ear, and has ever proved an advantageous vehicle to ſentiment and imagery. The inexpreſſible charm it ſheds over language can no more be doubted by one who has felt it, than the delight received from ſtrains of muſical harmony, or from the play of light and ſhade in a ſummer landſcape. He who can read the verſe of Pope or Dryden without exquiſite pleaſure, is rather to be pitied as wanting a

ſenſe, than to be reaſoned with if he attempts to juſtify his inſenſibility by argument. The ancient languages ſeem to have afforded much more ſcope for the melody of verſification than the modern; and little as we are acquainted with the true mode of reciting their poetry, we can diſcern traces of modulation in them which are extremely grateful to a claſſical ear. It appears to me that our poets have in general too much neglected the art of verſification. The more harſh and unmuſical our language is naturally, the more requiſite it is to correct theſe faults by ſtudious attention; and that much may be done with its help, the ſucceſs of the writers above mentioned, and of many more who might be named, ſufficiently proves. I would by no means adviſe that fantaſtic experiments ſhould be tried of adapting to our tongue foreign meaſures for which it is totally unfit. We have in our own ſtores an abundance of received meaſures applicable to all ſubjects, which may be rendered highly pleaſing if com-

poſed with due attention to the natural and fixed proſody of our language. But few as our rules are, many among us ſeem to take a pride in diſregarding even them; and in their diſdain of ſhackles, they not only reject all reſtraints upon thought and expreſſion, but will not ſubmit to read and pronounce after any other model than their own. This, however, is a digreſſion; and I ſhall conclude this part of the ſubject by obſerving, that beſides the immediate gratification derived from the melody of verſe, a ſenſibility to its effects is the eſſential preparative towards attaining the graces of a ſweet and well-modulated ſtyle in proſe. The greateſt orators, ancient and modern, have acknowledged their obligations to poetry on this head. Even that ſpurious product of the art, poetical proſe, in order to become tolerable to perſons of taſte, is obliged to borrow from verſe a ſort of rhythm, founded upon reſembling principles, though imperfect in its execution.

The *diction* of poetry is language in

its nobleſt dreſs, nor is it poſſible to obtain an idea of the full power of words without being converſant with the works of poets. It elevates, points, and vivifies all it touches. It paints ſenſible objects in all the ſtrong colouring of circumſtantial and kindred imagery; it renders viſible the ſecret workings of paſſion and ſentiment by their corporeal expreſſions; and by aſſociating abſtract truths with reſemblances drawn from external nature, it indelibly imprints them upon the memory. In exquiſite poetry every word has its peculiar force, and aids the general impreſſion. Hence the diction is capable of being infinitely varied, and every ſelection of an epithet is an exerciſe of ingenuity. It is this which renders the work of a firſt-rate poet a perpetual ſtudy, ſupplying matter for compariſon, emendation, and all the niceties of ſagacious and learned criticiſm, almoſt without limit. It is in a manner rendered new by every new commentator, if well furniſhed for his taſk. The Virgil of Heyne, and

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the Lucretius of Wakefield, are ſtores of amuſive ſpeculation to thoſe who are the moſt familiar with theſe two great poets, the characteriſtics of whom, in their moſt finiſhed paſſages, (of Virgil, indeed, in almoſt every line) is, that nothing is neglected or unmeaning, but that the hand of the maſter appears even in the minuteſt particulars. Our Pope and Gray afford examples of ſimilar care and ſkill, and have therefore juſtly exerciſed the refined taſte in poetical expreſſion of the laſt-mentioned critic. I will not deny that it is poſſible to ſurvey theſe beauties of detail with a too microſcopic eye; yet the habit of beſtowing accurate attention upon works of real excellence cannot but be of general utility, and nothing invites it more or repays it better than a true reliſh for poetry.

Indeed, it is upon *particular beauties* that the principal effect of poetry depends:—I do not mean excluſively the beauties of language, but theſe, in combination with the charms of deſcription

and ſentiment. Great art is undoubtedly ſhewn in arranging the plan of an epic or a tragedy; and a fertile invention, in framing mythological and allegorical fictions; and theſe may juſtly challenge the admiration of the critic, who is well acquainted with all the difficulties attending ſuch efforts. But to the common reader theſe fundamental points are much leſs the objects of notice, than the detached parts which the poet has laboured with minute attention, and which, ſucceeding each other in all the variety of fancy, appear to him like the pictures in a gallery, where hiſtory-pieces, portrait, and landſcape follow each other promiſcuouſly. A narrative poem or a play will be read for the firſt time with curioſity reſpecting its ſtory and concluſion, like any other piece of narration; but if it has merit enough to be admitted into the ſtock of a ſtudent's treaſures, it will be re-peruſed chiefly for the ſake of the paſſages of peculiar excellence interſperſed through it, which perhaps do not give out all their

beauties

beauties even to a ſecond or third reading. Thus it is that all the great works of ancient and modern times become part of the daily food, as it were, of the polite ſcholar, and impregnate his mind with their richeſt fruits. The mixture of very groſs defects will not conſiderably impair the pleaſure derived from excellence; for a habit is ſoon acquired of gliding over, with lax attention or free allowance, the parts we diſapprove, and dwelling only on ſuch as are worth our admiration. We are even, by this habit, ſometimes rendered too inſenſible to a writer's faults in a critical eſtimate of relative merit, though for the purpoſes with which poetry is uſually read we may be gainers by our indulgence.

This caſe is remarkably exemplified in the great object of Engliſh idolatry, Shakeſpeare, whom national favouritiſm has raiſed to a pre-eminence, which would ſurprize a foreigner who ſhould attend to his defects as much as to his excellencies. Abſolutely devoid of a qualification which

has been accounted one of the moſt eſſential to a dramatiſt,—the invention and happy management of plots; totally ignorant or regardleſs of the appropriation of manners to different ages and countries; little correct in the adaptation of language and ſentiment to character; and full of groſs faults in his ſtyle and diction; —he has yet the deciſive merit of having furniſhed more paſſages which dwell on the memory, and are applicable to common occaſions, than any other writer of his country, probably than any extant writer in the whole range of literature. By means of his nervous and highly figurative language, rather aided than injured in its effect by a turn to quaintneſs and bombaſt, he preſents even trite ſentiments and deſcriptions in ſo impreſſive a form, that they are ſeized with avidity by the imagination, and through it, act with irreſiſtible force on the heart. But in addition to this, a fund of ſtrong ſenſe and ſagacity ſuggeſted to him an uncommon variety of juſt and curious obſervations on

on mankind, which he has copiouſly introduced, ſometimes with little dramatic propriety, but ſo as to furniſh an almoſt inexhauſtible ſtore of moral precept and reflection. Theſe choice products of his genius are culled by the Engliſh reader with ſcarcely any interruption from the groſs matter in which, like pure gold in its matrix, they are often imbedded. His detached beauties ſhine in all collections, and even regular ſyſtems of morality have been fabricated from his works alone. Conſidering the univerſal familiarity with Shakeſpeare's beſt pieces acquired among us, either from the ſtage or in the cloſet, and the adoption of ſo much of his phraſeology by many of our popular writers, I do not think it is exaggerating the effect of poetry, to ſuppoſe that the characteriſtic Engliſh manlineſs of thought has been greatly indebted to him for its preſervation, amid prevailing luxury and faſhionable frivolity.

To purſue the topic of the value of a taſte for poetry as elevating the ſoul with noble

noble ſentiments, and ſtoring it with wiſe and generous maxims;—it may be remarked, that the works of all the great maſters in the art have a general tendency towards theſe effects, though ſome in a degree much ſuperior to others. In Homer's poems the qualities termed heroic are powerfully inculcated; but, it muſt be confeſſed, theſe are too much tinged with the barbariſm of the times, and ſtand too much apart not only from pure morals, but real dignity of character. Nor are his prudential maxims and obſervations on human life either deep or ſtriking, notwithſtanding the veneration with which they have been received by admiring commentators. Among the Greeks, the dramatic poets appear to have been thoſe who moſt abounded in moral ſentiment; though, indeed, when the nation began to diſtinguiſh itſelf for the culture of philoſophy, poetry in general imbibed a large portion of its ſpirit. It is unfortunate that the early luminary of Roman poetry, Lucretius, had embraced a

ſyſtem

ſyſtem which tended rather to degrade than raiſe the moral character; otherwiſe, no writer, perhaps, was ever more capable of allying gravity and force of thought with ſublimity of language. He has, however, furniſhed us with ſome moſt ſtriking and ſplendid paſſages againſt ſuperſtition, as well as ſome very pathetic lamentations on the evils which beſet human nature. Nor, indeed, can he be accuſed of the practical licentiouſneſs which has commonly been attributed to the Epicurean ſect; but, on the contrary, he preſerves the philoſophical ſobriety of Epicurus himſelf. Virgil, much richer and purer in morals and ſentiment than his Grecian archetype, yet not obtruſively or affectedly ſententious, proceeds throughout his works in a ſort of equal tenor of calm dignity, which elevates the reader's mind, without communicating to it any peculiar impreſſion. Lucan, on the other hand, is characteriſtically the poet of patriotiſm and high-toned philoſophy; and with ſuch commanding

commanding force does he inculcate theſe great topics, that, notwithſtanding all his puerility and extravagance, they who agree with him in principles, recur to his nobleſt paſſages with more frequency and delight, than perhaps to any other productions of ancient poetry.

It is not my purpoſe to go through an enumeration of the principal poets of different nations who have contributed to raiſe and purify the ſentiments of mankind; but it would be unpardonable to paſs over in ſilence the firſt of the liſt, our immortal Milton. The unparalleled ſublimity which diſtinguiſhes his conceptions on all topics, ſo peculiarly marks his moral and religious ideas, that if it be poſſible for verſe to operate as a charm againſt all that is mean, groveling, and corrupt in our nature, his are the ſtrains from which this benefit might be expected. Of his Paradiſe Loſt, Dr. Johnſon teſtifies that "every line breathes ſanctity of thought and purity of manners;" and though his Comus and Samſon

ſon Agoniſtes are not well calculated for dramatic effect on the ſtage, yet in the cloſet, the firſt, by its lofty morality, and the ſecond, by its preceptive wiſdom, are capable of affording inſtruction and pleaſure in a ſupreme degree. A reliſh for the works of Milton is not only a teſt of ſenſibility to the more exquiſite beauties of poetry, but a kind of meaſure of the exaltation of the mind in its moral and religious ſentiments.

It is properly obſerved by Dr. Johnſon, that Milton's excellence in theſe particulars was greatly owing to his familiar acquaintance with the ſcriptures; and indeed the ſubjects of his Paradiſe Loſt and Regained are ſo entirely ſcriptural, that he could not fail of imbibing their ſpirit as he wrote. How extraordinary, then, does it appear, that the above-mentioned critic, whoſe veneration for the Hebrew writings can ſcarcely be queſtioned, ſhould expreſs ſuch an unqualified diſapprobation of that alliance of poetry with devotion, which is ſo peculiarly their characteriſtic.

Speaking

Speaking of Dr. Watts, he ſays, "His devotional poetry is, like that of all others, unſatisfactory. The paucity of its topics enforces perpetual repetition, and the ſanctity of the matter rejects the ornaments of figurative diction." Had he forgotten that the Pſalms of David, the book of Job, and the prophetic writings of the Jews, form the baſis of all Chriſtian liturgies; that in theſe, deity is ſcarcely ever addreſſed or ſpoken of without a figure; and that the boldeſt figurative language prevails through the whole of the ſacred poeſy of the Hebrews? Was he not ſenſible, too, that devotion, as a paſſion of the mind, required the help of ſenſible images to give it animation; and that whatever poetry can effect in enhancing the other emotions, may be expected from it when applied to this? Perhaps he was afraid of raiſing the devotional feelings to an enthuſiaſtic flame. I do not mean to enter into a diſcuſſion of the value of theſe feelings, eſpecially as the ſubject is ſo admirably treated in an

an eſſay with which you are well acquainted. I ſhall only ſay that I am far from envying the man who can read the exalted ſtrains of Hebrew poetry, and their noble imitations in the hymns of Milton and Thomſon, with a diſpoſition rather to canvaſs their theological accuracy, than to indulge the glow of gratitude and admiration.

The effects of poetry in ſoftening and humanizing the ſoul have been recognized from the earlieſt periods, and many examples are recorded of what analogy would ſuggeſt on this head. Tyrants have wept at the pathetic repreſentations of diſtreſs on the ſtage; and it can ſcarcely be ſuppoſed that tears flowing from ſuch a ſource would be totally inefficacious in foſtering the growth of better feelings in the heart. Verſe has ſerved as the inſtrument of reſcuing the unfortunate from their calamities. The deliverance from ſlavery of ſeveral Athenians made captive at Syracuſe, in conſequence of their being able to repeat tender paſſages from the tragedies

tragedies of Euripides, is a well-known historical fact. But I am most pleased with a story told of the effect of a happy quotation from Homer made by the philosopher Xenocrates. This truly respectable man being sent as ambassador to the court of Antipater, for the redemption of some Athenian captives, was courteously invited by the prince to sit down with him to supper. He instantly replied to the offer in the generous words spoken by Ulysses to Circe on the same occasion:

Ω Κιρκη, τις γαρ κεν ανηρ ὁς εναισιμος ειη,
Πριν τλαιη πασσασθαι εδητυος ηδε ποτητος,
Πριν λυσασθ' ἑταρȣς και εν οφθαλμοισιν ιδεσθαι;
Αλλ' ει δη προφρασσα πιεν φαγεμεν τε κελευεις,
Λυσον, ἱν' οφθαλμοισιν ιδω εριηρας ἑταιρȣς.

Od. X. 383.

O Circe! who of human soul possess'd
Could glut with food and drink, while yet in bonds
His dear companions lie? If truly kind
You bid me to the festal board's repast,
O free them first, and give them to my sight!

Antipater was so struck with the ingenuity

nuity and patriotiſm of this application, that he immediately ordered the releaſe of the priſoners.

The mollifying effect of poetry is, indeed, a dubious topic of praiſe; and ſome of the principal proficients in the art have not been backward to confeſs that courage was by no means one of the conſpicuous virtues of a poet. It would be eaſy to counterbalance theſe confeſſions by ſtories of the martial ardour excited by the ſtrains of Homer and Tyrtæus, the valour diſplayed at Marathon by Æſchylus, &c. But, in truth, I think theſe detached facts, on both ſides, little to the purpoſe. Military courage is chiefly the reſult of habit and conſtitution, and little depends upon acquired taſtes of any kind.

The enemies of poetry have brought a more ſerious charge againſt it, from the topics in which it is converſant, many of which are calculated to inflame the paſſions and vitiate the morals. Paſſion, it muſt be allowed, is one of the grand and intereſting diſplays of nature on which

poets have ever delighted to exercise their descriptive powers; but they have for the most part painted it in such colours as to render its excesses an object of horror rather than of admiration. With respect to one, however, that of love, I confess they have in general been too indulgent. Poetry may with still more propriety than music be termed "the food of love;" and whatever censure it may deserve on that account, it must be content to bear. Poems, as well as novels, it is true, are filled with the baneful consequences of this passion, which may be taken for a warning, if the reader be so disposed. But it is commonly so allied with heroism in one sex, and sentiment in the other, that its errors are excused, if not applauded. After all, readers both in verse and prose will dwell most upon such productions as best suit their previous habits and principles, and tastes of every kind may meet with abundant gratification. It may be alledged, to the honour of literature in general, that the most masterly

terly performances are thoſe which are the moſt favourable to morals. The pureſt and moſt refined taſte will therefore prove the ſafeſt in this reſpect; and it ought to be a leading point in the education of youth, to infuſe an early reliſh for thoſe capital productions which are alike excellent as leſſons of morality, and as ſpecimens of genius. Attention enough has not been paid to this object; and both the ſtudies and the relaxations of ſchools and other ſeminaries are, in my opinion, capable of a much more uſeful direction than has uſually been given to them.

I cannot terminate this letter more forcibly, than by atteſting my own experience of the benefits derived from a taſte for poetry, at leaſt with reſpect to enjoyment. From the very early period at which books conſtituted one of my chief pleaſures, to the time at which I write, I have ſeldom paſſed a day without ſome peruſal of a poetical work. I have habitually made it the *bonne bouche* of my ſtudies, and have often placed it before

me as a ſort of recompence for aſſiduity in literary or profeſſional labours. My reliſh for it ſtill remains undiminiſhed; for whatever may be loſt in fondneſs for the wilder and more fanciful parts of poetry, is compenſated in increaſed attachment to the more ſerious and dignified. I would hope, too, that this taſte has not merely ſerved me for amuſement; and if I do not deceive myſelf, I can refer to the ſtrong impreſſions made by poetry, the origin of ſome of thoſe ſentiments, which I ſhould not willingly part with. This experience I think ſufficiently juſtifies me in recommending to my ſon what has ſo materially contributed to my own happineſs.

Adieu!

LETTER XVI.

ON THE BEST MODE OF ENCOUNTERING THE EVILS OF LIFE.

DEAR SON,

IT is ſcarcely neceſſary to make the formal obſervation, that no one can paſs through life without having a certain ſhare of evil to ſuſtain. The moſt fortunate man is ſufficiently ſenſible of this truth; and how unmixed ſoever his preſent enjoyments may be, he cannot at all times baniſh from his reflection the uncertain tenure by which he holds them, and his inability to ward off the ſtrokes of calamity to which he is continually expoſed. The proper conduct under misfortune muſt then be a topic intereſting to every thinking being. I have found it ſo to

myſelf, and have made it the frequent ſubject of my thoughts. If any thing valuable has been the reſult of theſe meditations, I cannot but deſire that you ſhould participate in it.

Two moral duties, different, and apparently oppoſite in their natures, occur to the mind on the proſpect of the evils of life;—reſignation under them, and reſiſtance to them. Natural temper will, perhaps, give ſuch a decided bias to one or the other of theſe modes of conduct, that no precept will influence perſons of very different characters to act alike on theſe occaſions; yet, ſince in all moral caſes there is a real ground for preferring one determination to another, it is incumbent on a creature of reaſon to make his preference rightly, and not paſſively to follow mere propenſities. Beſides, it will probably be found on inquiry, that there is not ſuch an oppoſition between the two duties above mentioned, as at firſt ſight may appear; and that each may properly take its turn according to circumſtances.

cumſtances. Theſe I ſhall proceed to conſider.

One claſs of misfortunes to which we are liable, may be ſtated to be, the loſs or deprivation of valuable things which we once poſſeſſed, and which are capable of being reſtored. It cannot be doubted that in theſe caſes the dictate of nature is to repair the loſs in the beſt manner we are able; and the more ſpeedily and deciſively the taſk is undertaken, the more certain is the indication of ſtrength and vigour of mind. A ſavage returning to his hut finds it burned to the ground. If he is of a lazy or deſponding diſpoſition, he will perhaps ſay, "Well then—I will creep among the thickeſt buſhes I can find, and trouble myſelf no more with building." This may be termed reſignation; nay, ſome would perhaps dignify it with the name of philoſophy: in fact, however, it is apathy and imbecility. The ſtronger-ſouled ſavage will inſtantly take his hatchet and repair to the foreſt in order to ſelect materials for a new hut.

This ſpirit may be traced through every condition of life, and every where is the object of juſt admiration. Horace plays the ſtoic too much, when he ſays diſparagingly of the tempeſt-toſt merchant,

——— mox reficit rates
Quaſſas, indocilis pauperiem pati:

Untaught a ſcanty lot to bear,
See him his ſhatter'd bark repair:

for, whatever ſyſtem of happineſs a man has adopted, he is right to purſue it with vigour, his notions remaining the ſame. Though the philoſopher may prove that the poſſeſſion of a crown is rather a burden than a bleſſing, we cannot help admiring the depoſed prince who bravely exerts himſelf for the recovery of what he thinks his birth-right. Horace was ſufficiently ſenſible of the merit of bearing up againſt misfortunes, in the perſon of Homer's Ulyſſes, whom he characteriſes in true poetical language, as

—— adverſis

—— adverſis rerum immerſabilis undis.

Still buoyant 'mid the waves of adverſe fate.

The hero was not leſs the *patient*, the *much-enduring man*, on account of this ſtruggle. He did not complain, but he acted. In like manner it is the generous injunction of the Sybil to Æneas,

Tu ne cede malis, ſed contra audentior ito
Quâ tua te Fortuna ſinet:

Yield not to ills, but puſh a bolder courſe
Where Fortune points the way.

Among the real characters of antiquity, Ariſtomenes, the Meſſenian chief, ſeems to have been peculiarly diſtinguiſhed by this buoyancy of ſpirit, this *renitency* of the mind againſt the preſſure of adverſity. Wounded, defeated, thrown into a dungeon, he ſtill preſerved his hopes and exertions; and when the foes of his country thought him at the laſt extremity, they ſuddenly found him more formidable than ever. The Scottiſh hero, Wallace, ſeems cloſely to have reſembled him in this reſpect.

ſpect. Such a diſpoſition of mind is ſhewn in ſmall things, as well as in great. It is mentioned as a characteriſtic trait of Charles XII. of Sweden, that once after he had ſat up all night to dictate diſpatches, his ſecretary, when they were finiſhed, having thrown ink inſtead of ſand over the writing, the king very coolly ſaid, "then we muſt begin again;" and went on as if nothing had happened. This was worthy of Charles at Bender. I have read of a ſcholar who, in a ſomewhat ſimilar caſe, had an opportunity of diſplaying as much heroiſm as any king or general in their greateſt actions—for the emergency was as great to him, as a conteſt for a kingdom to them. An accidental fire had deſtroyed his papers prepared for publication, the labour of many years. He recommenced the wotk that very day. The Romans made it criminal to deſpair of the commonwealth; and after the greateſt diſaſters, their only thought was how to repair them. This was the ſpirit that rendered them invincible.

ble. Horace well underſtood this diſtinguiſhing character of his countrymen, where he introduces Hannibal as lamenting his decline of fortune againſt ſo pertinacious a foe.

Duris ut ilex tonſa bipennibus
Nigræ feraci frondis in Algido,
Per damna, per cædes, ab ipſo
Ducit opes animumque ferro: &c.

Like the firm ilex ſhorn with ax ſevere,
That blackens on the mountain's wood-crown'd ſide,
'Mid wounds and death their dauntleſs fronts they rear,
And gain from ſteel itſelf new force and pride.

Hitherto there ſeems no doubt of the part a manly mind will act under loſs or misfortune. But it is a more difficult point to decide how far attempts ought to be made to redreſs thoſe original wrongs (if ſo they may be termed) of fortune, whereby privations are incurred of advantages highly eſteemed by the world. Such are mean birth, indigence, and natural defects, which doom a man, without extraordinary exertions, to paſs a whole life of poverty and obſcurity.

The

The difficulty here ariſes from the want of agreement reſpecting real goods; for while the worldly man without heſitation fixes his deſires upon wealth, rank, and ſplendour, as almoſt the only objects worthy of purſuit, the philoſopher affects to regard them rather as impediments towards the attainment of thoſe mental excellencies which alone in his eſtimation poſſeſs genuine value. Here then commences the conteſt between ambition and content, concerning which ſo many fine things have been ſaid in verſe and proſe. It is not my intention to collect them for your peruſal, ſince oratorical effuſions on general topics are of little uſe in the deciſion of particular points of conduct; and much muſt be left in this caſe to individual feeling. I have already intimated, in a letter "on the value of life," that I do not greatly eſteem thoſe efforts for the attainment of riches alone, which are made by perſons who might, by a proper improvement of the faculties beſtowed upon them, acquire a moderate

ſhare

ſhare of reſpect and comfort in an humble ſtation. Yet I cannot withhold my admiration from the man of ſuperior talents, who ſtruggles through all the obſtacles that fortune has thrown in his way, with the noble ambition of raiſing himſelf to that diſtinction in ſcience or letters, which may place him on his proper level in ſociety, and annul in his favour the excluſive claims of birth and title. Though he may partly concur with the vulgar in the final objects of his wiſhes, (who, indeed, can pretend not to partake in the common ſentiments of mankind?) yet the mode of purſuit throws an adventitious dignity over the acquiſition. The unmeaning title of modern knighthood could add nothing to the illuſtrious name of NEWTON, yet it was honourable to have attained it by means of eminence like his, and the title gained a conſequence by his thinking it worthy his acceptance. Biography affords many animating examples of the force of genius and vigour united, to elevate a man to the celebrity for

which

which nature had marked him out, though fortune had refuſed to concur in the deſtination. Of theſe, I recollect none more worthy of being admired than that of Linnæus; who, though ſo indigent at the univerſity as to be obliged to patch his own ſhoes, perſiſted, amid ſcorns and hardſhips of every kind, in the ſteady purſuit of that courſe of ſtudy which he knew to be eſſential to the great objects he had in view, and which, aided by the confident preſage of future fame and diſtinction, bore up his ſpirits againſt every diſcouragement.

To riſe to eminence in his own profeſſion, cannot but be eſteemed a fair and laudable mark of ambition to every man, how humble ſoever the ſtage from which he makes his commencement; for profeſſion is a common character to all the individuals belonging to it, and forms a reaſonable ground for equal expectations. Through the influence of this proper ambition it has happened, that the moſt eminent in every walk have uſually been

thoſe who have laboured under the greateſt diſadvantages in their origin. Such men muſt of neceſſity be endowed with ſuperior genius and force of mind, as well as with particular talents for their profeſſion, in order to arrive at diſtinction in it; whereas one for whom a way of life is choſen merely on account of circumſtances of convenience or expected advantage, may attain a certain degree of ſucceſs, with moderate talents and ſmall exertions. The lives of painters, whoſe art, perhaps beyond any other, affords fair proof of the relative merit of its profeſſors, abound in inſtances of this fact. Boys employed to grind colours have often turned out celebrated artiſts, while favoured pupils of the greateſt ſchools have never been heard of. In like manner, the ſoldier who fights his way from the ranks to the generals' ſtaff, cannot but be both brave and able; while the prince of the blood who ſteps into that ſtation by virtue of mere birth, may poſſibly be neither one nor the other. But impartial

hiſtory

hiſtory records the actions of the former, while the latter only ſupplies a name and date to events.

To conclude the head of *content*; I muſt confeſs that I doubt whether this principle ever enabled a perſon permanently to reſt ſatisfied in a ſtate of degradation and obſcurity, who was conſcious of powers to raiſe him to honour and reputation. Such an one muſt have frequent miſgivings concerning the motives of his quietiſm; and muſt ſuſpect indolence and timidity, where an indulgent obſerver might perhaps give him credit for a generous contempt of the objects of vulgar admiration. The philoſopher and the cœnobite may, indeed, without regret have reſigned the purſuit of riches and grandeur, but they will not readily become inſenſible to the charms of glory and influence. Diogenes in his tub, and Simeon on his pillar, was as unwilling to remain undiſtinguiſhed in the throng, as Alexander or Cæſar. I am far from applauding ſuch diſplays of abſurd ambition,

but they are leſſons in the knowledge of mankind. Let not then young men of talents ſuperior to their condition haſtily conſign themſelves to an oblivious retreat, under the notion of practiſing a virtue, which may eventually be a ſource of ſelf-reproach. If this be done, as I believe it ſometimes is, with the ſecret hope of gaining reputation with the world for an effort of philoſophical ſelf-denial, it may be depended upon that ſuch an inconſiſtency will fail of its purpoſe. The world is ready enough to forget the man who deſerts it, and a wiſh for oblivion is ſoon literally gratified. It is Swift, I think, who in one of his letters ſhrewdly reminds a friend that "oblitus meorum" is immediately followed by "obliviſcendus et illis." Johnſon has ſome excellent remarks on this topic in his life of Cowley, which ſhould be read by all who entertain vague notions of the bleſſings of retirement and ſolitude, while they really pant after fame.

There is a claſs of loſſes which, though

they do not admit of reſtoration in kind, yet allow of *ſubſtitutions* which may greatly alleviate the misfortune. In a former letter on conſolation under the loſs of friends by death, I enlarged conſiderably on the topic of ſubſtitution, as the moſt effectual remedy applicable to ſuch a caſe. In all others of a ſimilar claſs, the ſame relief ſhould be ſought after; and the purſuit of it requires the union of the ſpirit of reſignation with that of reſiſtance,—the firſt, to prepare the way for the ſecond. I have loſt, probably for ever, that health which fitted me for active ſervices and enjoyments, and with it, many ſources of happineſs and utility. Shall I abandon myſelf to unavailing ſorrow, and drag out a lifeleſs exiſtence in the inaction of deſpair? No.—My head and hands are ſtill free—I can write, read, and converſe. To theſe, then, I muſt look for my future amuſements and occupations, and I may yet make a good *ſalvage* for the remains of life. Cicero, when deprived of his political exiſtence by the overthrow of the

the Roman conſtitution, thus writes to a friend. "Angar? excruciemne me? quid aſſequar? deinde quem ad finem? Vivas, inquis, in literis. An quicquam aliud me agere cenſes? haud poſſem vivere niſi in literis viverem." "Shall I vex and torment myſelf? To what purpoſe? You may live, you ſay, to letters. Do you think I employ myſelf in any thing elſe? I could not live at all unleſs I lived to letters." In reality, this life of his has gained him more poſthumous fame than all the buſy ſcenes of his public life.

Many are the caſes in which ſubſtitution may ſucceſsfully be applied, provided the mind be firſt brought to a proper temper. The loſs of power and place may be compenſated by the rational uſe of leiſure, and many have found it a moſt abundant compenſation. Even the loſs of liberty may be alleviated by ſuch a cloſe occupation of the mind in ſtudy, as will ſcarcely allow time for perceiving the want of it. Raleigh wrote his hiſtory of the world in priſon, and probably was a

happier man during the compoſition of it, than while purſuing his golden ſpeculations among the poor Indians. The admirable Grotius ſo immerſed himſelf in a variety of ſtudies during his confinement at the caſtle of Louveſtein, that he loſt all ſenſe of the tediouſneſs of his ſituation; and other great ſcholars have rather regarded impriſonment as a favourable opportunity for completing ſome literary deſign which the buſineſs of the world had impeded, than as a ſtate of ſuffering. I can conceive of few greater misfortunes than the loſs of ſight; yet we find it is often borne with cheerfulneſs by indulging a ſocial diſpoſition, or cultivating a taſte for muſic. In all theſe inſtances, the ſubſtitute may at firſt appear very inadequate, but it will grow more and more efficacious the longer it is applied. Let but the mind become intereſted in a purſuit, and it is ſurpriſing what ſeemingly light and trivial objects will ſtand in the ſtead of thoſe which in common eſti-

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mation infinitely exceed them in importance.

There are evils, however, which admit neither of removal nor of redreſs by ſubſtitution; and under the preſſure of theſe it is, that the virtue of quiet reſignation is peculiarly indicated. Of this kind is acute and incurable bodily pain, which I agree with the Abbé de St. Pierre in placing at the head of all natural evils, regardleſs of the ſtoical ſophiſm which made it no evil at all. Under its dominion it is vain to think of happineſs in any ſhape. It abſorbs the whole man, and puts to flight all thought but of itſelf. The only alleviation of which it is capable, is to endure it with firmneſs and ſelf-poſſeſſion. This has doubly a good effect: it prevents thoſe intemperate ſtruggles which aggravate the pain; and it ſoothes the ſoul with a conſciouſneſs of its own ſtrength. Though, as I have ſaid, pain, in its extremity, occupies the whole attention of the ſufferer, yet during thoſe remiſſions which always in ſome degree attend it, other ſenſations

ſteal in, which, if of an agreeable kind, have ſome effect in ſoftening the violence of the entire paroxyſm. It has always been obſerved that pain is beſt borne in the preſence of ſpectators, the applauſe beſtowed on fortitude operating as a ſort of charm againſt it. Indeed, as even the pain called corporeal is felt through the medium of the mind, it is poſſible to conceive of mental emotions ſo ſtrong as to aboliſh all ſenſe of pain; but theſe cannot be applied as ordinary remedies. Enthuſiaſm will, on ſome great emergencies, bear up the ſoul againſt all bodily torments; but the enthuſiaſtic temper is neceſſarily an unequal one, and therefore ill adapted to contend with a perpetually recurring evil, which rouſes no particular paſſion or principle to reſiſt it, but wears down the ſpirits by inceſſant ſuffering. Hence even in religious and political perſecutions, enthuſiaſm is very apt to give way under continued ſeverities, while calm and equal courage endures to the laſt.

The infirmities of age, eſpecially when

accompanied with narrow circumſtances, which no exertions at that period can improve, conſtitute an evil, or, rather, a combination of evils, only to be encountered by patient reſignation; and truly admirable is that compoſure of mind which, as we often ſee, cauſes ſuch a lot to be undergone with ſerenity, and even with cheerfulneſs. I do not add to the amount of the miſeries of this condition, the fear of death, ſince death is their natural termination, and muſt be regarded by a mind unimpreſſed with falſe terrors as "a conſummation devoutly to be wiſhed for." That the dread of death in ſuch circumſtances is merely an artificial ſentiment, I am fully convinced from obſervation among that claſs of people whoſe feelings are leaſt diſturbed by fictitious notions, the product of leiſure brooding over myſterious ſyſtems. Theſe uniformly

Count death kind nature's ſignal of retreat,

even independently of their aſpirations

after "a happier ſeat," though ſuch a hope muſt undoubtedly contribute to gild the parting ſcene. Moſt beautifully has Goldſmith ſaid of the path to the tomb, that

Reſignation gently ſlopes the way.

For this principle the moſt ſolid foundation certainly is the religious conviction, that every thing is ordained for the final greateſt good, not only of the whole, but *of every individual*. This is a perſuaſion which, if firmly entertained, one would ſuppoſe adequate to put an end to all murmuring and impatience on account of evils merely temporary and remedial; did not a thouſand inſtances prove how feebly diſtant objects, ſeen only by the eye of the mind, act upon us in compariſon with thoſe which are preſent, and obvious to ſenſe. Moreover, I will not undertake to ſay from what ſyſtem the conviction above mentioned can be clearly deduced. But reſignation is likewiſe a *habit*, induced

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by the conſtant practice of meeting every calamity with an unruffled, unperturbed mind. This may be formed by early diſcipline, in which every ſlight occurrence is employed as an eſſay or leſſon; and in fact they often prove as hard trials in proportion to the acquired power of endurance, as the moſt ſerious evils in after-life. It is therefore of importance to accuſtom one's-ſelf to bear trivial loſſes and diſappointments without complaint; for by ſuppreſſing the external ſigns of emotion, the feeling itſelf comes in time to be brought under controul. Nothing relative to moral diſcipline is indifferent —all operates to confirm either good or bad habits.

For you, my ſon, I wiſh, in the firſt place, (a parent's natural wiſh!) that you may undergo as few trials from adverſe fortune as the human lot will permit:— in the ſecond place I wiſh, and from your temper and principles I confidently expect, ſpirit to reſiſt, and reſignation to endure,

endure, in proportion to the demand that may be made upon you for the exertion of either of these qualities.

Adieu!

LETTER

LETTER XVII.

ON THE COMPARATIVE VALUE OF DIFFERENT STUDIES.

DEAR SON,

THOUGH it is probably advantageous to ſociety that every object which can occupy the human mind ſhould engage the attention of ſome individuals, and the freedom of ſtudy demands that the utmoſt latitude ſhould be given to diverſity of taſtes, yet to each individual ſeparately conſidered, it is by no means a matter of indifference how he directs his choice. He may, indeed, fill up his time with purſuits of almoſt any kind; he may become intereſted in any; but if it be the purpoſe of ſtudy to make acquiſitions of knowledge which may enlarge the conceptions,

ceptions, remove errors and prejudices, ſuggeſt uſeful concluſions, and really elevate a man amid his ſpecies, it muſt be of fundamental importance how he ſelects the objects on which he is to employ the force of his intellectual powers. And not only is it of conſequence that he ſhould be able properly to direct his own purſuits, but it is deſirable that he ſhould be provided with a rule whereby to form ſome eſtimate (a liberal and impartial one) of the proportional value of other men's attainments. For, ſince many of theſe make a claim to the public applauſe and reſpect, it is but right that the public ſhould poſſeſs ſome principles on which to found their adjudication. Horace, with his uſual good ſenſe, has ſaid,

Nec tua laudabis ſtudia, nec aliena reprendes;
Praiſe not your own, nor blame another's taſte;

which is certainly juſt, as far as it regards the equal right of choice exiſting in different perſons; but this does not render the things themſelves equal. The maxim, however,

however, is a good one, as far as it warns us againſt making our own purſuits a ſtandard by which thoſe of others are to be eſtimated. To this partiality we are all liable; and the only way to correct it, is to lay down ſuch large and general principles of preference, as will not readily bend to the excluſive ſervice of particular likings.

I muſt premiſe to the conſideration I mean in the preſent letter to give this ſubject, that the *value* of ſtudies concerning which I inquire, is to the ſtudent himſelf, not to the community. Were value to be eſtimated according to the common notions of utility, the arts by which the neceſſaries, nay, the luxuries, of life are procured, would obtain more votes in their favour than the ſublimeſt ſciences. A memoir in the Swediſh "Amænitates Academicæ," entitled *Cui Bono*, relates, that a certain perſon who had enriched himſelf by the ſale of ſalt-fiſh, on being ſhown the royal muſeum of natural hiſtory, arranged in ſcientific order,

order, aſked "what was the good of all this?"—a queſtion, the writer ſays, fit for ſuch a man to make. He ſeems, however, to have thought it of ſome importance; for the purpoſe of his paper is to ſhow, that natural hiſtory, even according to the vulgar notions of utility, *is* good for ſomething. It muſt, indeed, be confeſſed that many of his arguments are ſo trifling, that the ſalt-fiſh merchant would be juſtified in valuing, upon that ground, Beukelen, the inventor of the art of pickling herrings, beyond Linnæus or Buffon. Further, the utility of ſtudies to any other than the ſtudents themſelves, depends upon the communication of the knowledge acquired. Writers, on the moſt abſtruſe and confined topics, may be ſerviceable to the few who engage in ſimilar purſuits with their own; whereas mere readers and ſpeculators, on the moſt popular ſubjects, are fruitleſs with reſpect to ſociety. But the duty of communicating our ideas is a ſeparate conſideration, which I do not intend to engage in.

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One of the moſt material circumſtances on which the relative value of an object of ſtudy depends is, that it be ſomething real, ſtable, of general import, and not indebted for its conſequence to temporary and conventional modes of thinking. In this reſpect, nature has greatly the advantage over art. Whatever is learned concerning her is an eternal truth, which will preſerve its relation to other things as long as the world endures. The motions of the heavenly bodies, the influence of the elements, the properties of minerals, vegetables, and animals, are *grand facts* which ſpeak a common language to all mankind in all ages, and afford a perpetual fund of uſe and entertainment. The more wide and comprehenſive a ſurvey is taken of theſe objects, the better they anſwer the purpoſe of enlarging the mind, and eſtabliſhing a baſis for truths of univerſal application. Hence the advantage of ſtudying them in a connected and ſyſtematic mode, and framing general propoſitions concerning them. But the foundation

dation for theſe muſt be a very accurate inveſtigation of particular facts, ſince the inſtant their guidance is quitted, and reliance is placed upon analogical deductions, error commences. Obſervation and experiment muſt therefore go hand in hand with reaſoning; nor was there ever a true philoſopher who did not unite theſe proceſſes. I can conceive of no employment of the human faculties nobler than thus taking the ſcale of creation, detecting all its mutual connexions and dependencies, inveſtigating the laws by which it is governed as a whole, and the economy of its conſtituent parts, and alternately making uſe of the ſagacity of the ſenſes in minute reſearch, and the powers of intellect in comparing and abſtracting. The ſtudies, then, which range under the heads of natural philoſophy and natural hiſtory, and are comprehended under the general term of phyſics, appear to me to take the lead of all mental purſuits with reſpect to extent, variety, and dignity. Let it be underſtood, however,

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that I include among them the ſtudy of one of the nobleſt objects nature preſents, and certainly the moſt intereſting to a human creature—that of man himſelf. To aſcertain what he eſſentially is, what are the faculties of body and mind which characteriſe him as the head of the animal creation, and what are the variations induced in him by education, habit, climate, and mode of life, is ſtrictly a branch of phyſics, and has by the beſt writers been treated as ſuch.

It is, doubtleſs, impoſſible for a ſingle mind to embrace all the objects here pointed out ſo as to fathom the depths of human knowledge in each;—to be at the ſame time the mind of Newton, Locke, Boyle, and Haller: but according to the degree in which a man had imbibed the leading ideas which conſtituted the intellectual furniture of ſuch minds, I ſhould eſtimate the value of his attainments; and I ſhould prefer, though not in point of genius, yet with reſpect to acquiſitions, one who combined a tolerably

accurate acquaintance with all the branches of knowledge poſſeſſed by theſe, to a complete adept in any one of them. The laſt mentioned of the above perſons, Haller, was ſcarcely, I believe, ſurpaſſed by any man in the variety, and at the ſame time the ſolidity, of his phyſical knowledge. Buffon may be named as one whoſe general views were as grand, and whoſe purſuits were planned upon as enlarged a ſcale, as thoſe of any perſon whom ſtudies of this claſs have rendered famous, though he wanted accuracy and ſolidity in many of the particulars of his ſpeculations. As a criterion of this capaciouſneſs and elevation of underſtanding, I would ſuppoſe a delegate ſent from this earth to explore ſome other world and bring back the moſt complete and important information concerning it:—the perſon duly ſelected for ſuch a miſſion would, in my idea, poſſeſs a title to the ſuperiority in queſtion.

Although nature, thus ſtudied, appears to me the nobleſt of all ſubjects that can

occupy the mind, I am far from affixing the ſame proportionate value to inveſtigations of detached parts of the works of nature. In theſe, all the grandeur of large and connected views is frequently loſt, and the whole attention is employed on petty details, which lead to nothing further. A very little mind may ſucceſsfully apply itſelf to the arrangement of ſhells and butterflies by their forms and colours, and gain nothing by the proceſs but the ſimple ideas of form and colour, as ſerving for marks of diſtinction. To ſuch minds, an arrangement of ribbons by their ſhades and patterns would be a perfectly ſimilar employment. I do not deny that even theſe humble labourers in ſcience are neceſſary to complete the great fabric of the ſyſtem of nature, and give accuracy and uniformity to its nomenclature. Their induſtry and exactneſs deſerve praiſe; but it is better for a ſtudent, capable of more extenſive views, to make uſe of their labours, than to imitate them. What I have ſaid, however, muſt be un-

derſtood with limitation; for, as I have already obſerved, it is incumbent on the inquirer into nature to ſpare no pains in the accurate ſearch after facts; but theſe ſhould be facts not trifling or inſulated, but eſſential to the formation of thoſe general theorems in which ſyſtematical knowledge conſiſts. It is certain, for inſtance, that while the Linnæan claſs of *cryptogamia* ſubſiſts, the vegetable economy muſt be very incompletely known. It cannot, however, be aboliſhed without the minuteſt examination of the generative organs of moſſes, ferns, algæ, lichens, &c. which may therefore reaſonably employ the ableſt and moſt philoſophical naturaliſt. Bonnet, a philoſopher in every ſenſe of the word, occupied himſelf for years in microſcopical obſervations and experiments on the ſmalleſt parts of nature, but it was with the purpoſe of eſtabliſhing important concluſions concerning the eſſential characters of the animal and vegetable kingdoms, and the limits between each. Modern chemiſtry is one of

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the moſt important branches of phyſics, and comprehends many truly ſublime ſpeculations relative to the globe we inhabit, but its theory is entirely built upon experiments, in which the niceſt mechanical attentions are neceſſary to avoid fundamental errors.

A branch of ſtudy which appears to me the next in dignity, is that which, ſelecting *man* from amidſt the objects of creation, purſues a courſe of inquiry into his hiſtory, tracing the origin and progreſs of nations, their languages, arts, manners, ſyſtems of polity, and all the viciſſitudes of their fortune; and which, taking theſe facts for its guide, inveſtigates the principles of legiſlation, government, commerce, and all the relations proceeding from human ſociety, with the means of improving and perfecting them. Here is ample ſcope for the exerciſe of the nobleſt faculties; and ſome of the greateſt names in the literary catalogue rank under this diviſion. To follow the labours of the hiſtorian, the juriſt, the antiquary, the lin-

guiſt, and the geographer, and from their united materials to form large ſurveys of the ſeveral ages and races of mankind, is an employment for a genuine philoſopher; and nothing ſo much conduces to raiſe the mind above narrow prejudices as ſpeculations of this kind, conducted upon a liberal plan. The acquirements of a Grotius and a Monteſquieu, a Jones and a Gibbon, cannot be viewed without high admiration, nor the uſe they made of them without liberal applauſe. The demand for knowledge of this kind as materials for converſation, is perhaps greater than that of the preceding claſs; and its application to the weighty affairs of the world, ſuch as the making of laws and treaties, carrying on negociations, and framing public inſtitutions, renders it a more direct road to fortune and honour. Theſe are therefore the favourite ſtudies not only of the ſage in human life, but of the ambitious man; and they are peculiarly proper for thoſe who by birth and rank are deſtined to fill important offices

in the ſtate. It is, however, to be obſerved, that without a portion of that phyſical knowledge of man which I have referred to the former head, the views taken of him in his artificial ſtate are apt to miſlead. Old as the world is, new caſes in ſociety are continually occurring, which cannot ſafely be decided by the analogy of precedent. Man, in all forms and ſituations, is eſſentially *the animal, man.* His natural character will occaſionally break through all the ſhackles of poſitive inſtitutions; and, indeed, under the dominion of thoſe inſtitutions, there is more ſimilarity in human actions and their motives, than external diverſities would lead an obſerver to ſuppoſe. Even in this branch of ſtudy, then, nature takes precedence of art.

There are a ſet of ſtudies which have engaged the attention of the ſpeculative and learned perhaps beyond any others, and, I conceive, much beyond their merits. Theſe are ſuch as relate to the *opinions* of mankind. The ſubjects of theſe

opinions have, indeed, in appearance, been the moſt ſublime and important. Deity and its attributes, mind and matter, ſpace, time, exiſtence, the prior and the future condition of created beings, are all high and impoſing topics, capable of exerciſing the utmoſt force and ſubtlety of the human faculties. But as reaſonings concerning them muſt, in great part, be the mere internal operation of the mind upon its own ideas, without any teſt from external nature to prove their truth, it is no wonder that the efforts of the greateſt geniuſes have been ſo far from reducing them to certainty, that they have not even been able to make them clearly comprehended. Controverſialiſts on theſe points complain to this day that they are miſunderſtood or miſrepreſented by their antagoniſts; and in common with Milton's fallen angels, they

——— find no end, in wand'ring mazes loſt.

Now, although an original genius, confident in his powers, ought not, perhaps, to

to refuſe a ſubject becauſe all former inquirers have failed in their attempts to elucidate it; yet, I think, a private ſtudent may with propriety conſider, with reſpect to himſelf, certainty as unattainable, where great diverſity of opinion remains after long and full diſcuſſion; and ſurely, without the proſpect of attaining certainty, or a probability almoſt equal to it, there is little encouragement for the ſerious application of time and labour. It is true, a general acquaintance with opinion, is part of the knowledge of man; which, to be complete, ſhould comprehend what he has *thought*, as well as what he has *done*; but to conſume laborious days and nights in endeavouring to fathom the meaning of writers who never had a preciſe meaning, but have merely dreſſed in a ſolemn and ſpecious garb the reveries of an unchaſtiſed imagination, is ſacrificing too much to vain curioſity, or miſplaced admiration. I have already, in a letter upon *authority*, ventured to aſſert that no man ever deſerved ſuch a degree of credit from his

fellow-men, as to have his opinions admitted on the footing of realities, and his *dicta* ſtudied like divine oracles. Who are Plato, Ariſtotle, and a hundred other celebrated names that might be mentioned, that ſo much pains ſhould be beſtowed on reconciling their contradictions, clearing up their obſcurities, penetrating their myſteries, and doing for them what, if they were really the maſter-writers they are ſuppoſed, their works would not require? "He who is not intelligible (ſays Jortin) is ſeldom intelligent;" an admirable maxim, due attention to which would cut ſhort many a profound diſquiſition on the ſenſe of authors!

You have probably read our lamented friend Dr. Enfield's abridgment of "Brucker's Hiſtory of Philoſophy." Thoſe two quarto volumes contain a ſketch of opinions propoſed in works which of themſelves would fill a copious library. But of theſe, how very few are intrinſically worth a more minute examination than this ſketch preſents? How manifeſt

manifeſt is it to an unprejudiced mind, that this great maſs of opinion chiefly relates to ſubjects either utterly unfathomable by the human underſtanding, or the mere creation of verbal ſophiſtry? Even what ſeems to belong to practical wiſdom, is generally ſo artificial and chimerical in its principles, that it may well be denominated, in Milton's words,

Vain wiſdom all, and falſe philoſophy.

Shall I refer you to the ſchools of modern theology for topics of diſcuſſion more certain and more important? Alas! what ſpectacle do they afford ſo ſtriking as miſemployed talents, and the wreck of intellect? Read the life of the great Grotius, the patriot, the lawyer, the hiſtorian, the poet, the ſtateſman, and ſee how wretchedly he was bewildered in his youth by the unintelligible diſputes between the Calviniſts and Arminians, in his advanced years by the differences between proteſtantiſm and popery—the ſource to him of impriſonment, exile, and obloquy; and

then

then judge of the encouragement ſuch an employment of the faculties affords. How eaſy would it be to multiply examples to this effect, were it neceſſary!

Another diviſion of ſtudies may be formed (not, indeed, with ſtrict accuracy of arrangement, but ſufficient for the preſent purpoſe) upon a view of what *man has done*, conſidered as a creator in art and ſcience. A multiplicity of objects here opens upon the mind, of which I ſhall content myſelf with ſelecting two or three for particular conſideration.

As the nobleſt diſtinction of a human being is the uſe of language, that art which teaches to uſe it in the beſt manner, or the *art of compoſition*, may take the lead under this diviſion. By ſtudying its principles, ſo as to be able to enter into all the beauties and delicacies of fine writing, a ſource of entertainment of the higheſt kind is provided, independently of the power acquired of imitating what we admire. I have already touched upon this ſubject in my letter on the advantages reſulting

reſulting from a taſte for poetry, but it is capable of great extenſion by comprehending the art of criticiſm in all its branches. This comprizes an accurate reſearch into the nature of language in general, and the genius of thoſe particular languages in which the ſtudent is converſant; an acquaintance with the character of ſtyle in all its diverſities, and the various figures of ſpeech employed to adorn or invigorate it; a knowledge of the eſſential diſtinctions between the different ſpecies of compoſition; and a familiarity with all the principal works of different ages and countries, in order to trace imitations and form exact ideas of comparative merit. The number of capital productions in verſe and proſe to which the ancient and a few of the modern languages give acceſs, is ſo great, that the critical ſtudy of them will furniſh employment for all the leiſure any ſcholar can command; and ſo ſeductive is this branch of literature, that perſons claſſically educated are often ſeen to make it almoſt the ſole

occupation

occupation of life. To its intrinſic value, was formerly added ſo high a degree of reputation attending a proficiency in it, as placed it almoſt at the head of intellectual purſuits. This was derived from its real importance at the time of the reſtoration of ancient learning, when to give accurate editions of the claſſics, and elucidate them by commentaries, was one of the moſt uſeful taſks in which a ſcholar could engage. Since this buſineſs has been tolerably completed, and other ſtudies have taken the lead in public eſtimation, the art of criticiſm has ſomewhat declined in dignity; though it ſtill ſtands high among that claſs who are peculiarly termed *the learned*, and the adepts in it themſelves appear little inclined to yield the precedence they formerly aſſumed. It muſt be allowed in their favour, that the acquiſitions neceſſary to arrive at diſtinction as a critic are extremely various, and imply aſſiduous cultivation of the underſtanding. Many of them, too, are ſo elegant in their nature, that we may reaſonably wonder

they

they have not more generally tended to poliſh the manners and humanize the temper. That they have not greatly conduced to enlarge the mind is leſs ſurpriſing, ſince for the moſt part they conſiſt in points of knowledge that are limited to their ſpecific objects, and terminate in themſelves. The niceties of Greek and Latin proſody, which it might coſt ſome of the beſt years of life to acquire, are, to a modern, at leaſt, mere inſulated facts, derived from authority; and though the formation and mechaniſm of language is, in ſome ſenſe, a branch of philoſophy, yet it is of a kind which bears little upon other topics. In undertaking to explain the ſenſe of an author, indeed, the critic or commentator muſt be maſter of all the knowledge referred to by that author; and this will often oblige him to take a wide range through the hiſtory, mythology, arts, manners, and cuſtoms, of antiquity; but what a maſs of extravagance and abſurdity muſt he encounter in this progreſs! and how muſt his memory be burdened

burdened with a multitude of trifling particulars! How fully theſe occupy the mind, to the excluſion of more valuable matter, is evident from the groſs ignorance occaſionally diſplayed by annotators when they touch upon topics which ought to be determined by an appeal to fact, rather than to books. I confeſs I ſhould feel heſitation in accepting the mental ſtock of a Saumaiſe, a Scaliger, a Bentley, and a Burman, high as they rank in the records of erudition.

The preceding obſervations, however, refer more to the critic by profeſſion, than to the private ſtudent, who has no occaſion to enter further into the examination of authors, than to obtain a juſt perception of their excellencies and defects. This end is perhaps better attained, by ſtudying thoſe principles of good taſte in writing which are deducible from the philoſophy of the human mind, than by a cloſe attention to all the minute particulars of diction, which is apt to interfere with, rather than to aid, thoſe larger

larger ſurveys on which an enlightened judgment of whole works muſt be formed. Criticiſm thus exerciſed is one of the moſt agreeable, and certainly not of the leaſt dignified employments of the mental faculties; and few topics are better adapted either to cloſet amuſement, or to liberal and cultured converſation.

I ſhall ſay little reſpecting thoſe agreeable ſtudies which have for their object the cultivation of a taſte for the fine arts. The propriety of engaging in theſe depends partly upon natural talent, but principally upon the opportunity of having recourſe to ſpecimens of art of the moſt perfect kind, by way of example and illuſtration. Without ſuch a reference to practice, the ſtudy of the theory will be apt to terminate in pedantic ſelf-conceit, expoſing the fancied proficient to the ridicule of artiſts and real connoiſſeurs. The eye, and even the hand, ſhould be exerciſed in order to fit a perſon for judging on theſe points. Neither the power nor the limits of art can be exactly known

without trial; and delicacy of taſte is only to be acquired by compariſon of the performances of great maſters.

Mathematical ſtudies muſt already be ſuppoſed to ſtand high in my eſtimate, ſince I have placed in the firſt claſs thoſe large and ſublime views of nature, ſome of which could not originally have been formed, nor can now be comprehended, without the principles of mathematics. But beſides their undoubted value as means, they have by many been purſued ultimately, as affording the higheſt and pureſt exerciſe to the intellectual powers. Fully ſenſible of my own inadequacy to judge of their worth in this reſpect, and fearful of giving way to partiality, I ſhall only ſpeak of them from obſerving their effects upon others. As far as I have remarked, few of thoſe who during the early part of their lives have gone deep into mathematics, acquire ſuch a reliſh for them, as to be induced ſpontaneouſly to continue their application to them at an after-period. Whether it be that they find

find the requiſite mental exertion too ſevere, or that they become wearied with ſtudies which offer no further proſpects, and furniſh no materials for converſation —it ſeems to me to be the fact, that mathematical purſuits are uſually deſerted, as ſoon as the incidental motives which cauſed them to be entered upon, or the firſt ardour of curioſity, have ceaſed. Where this has not been the caſe, they are ſometimes found to occupy the whole mind, to the excluſion of all other ſubjects, pleaſant or uſeful; and ſurely the ideas of figure and number alone are inſufficient to fill the compaſs of the human underſtanding. A ſtory is told of a profound mathematician, who being with difficulty perſuaded to read through Homer's Iliad, coldly obſerved at the concluſion, that he did not find that the author had *proved* any thing. It would, however, be very unjuſt to repreſent this inſenſibility as the univerſal reſult of mathematical ſtudies. Many inſtances may be produced of their alliance in the ſame perſon with

polite and philoſophical literature. Of theſe, it will ſuffice to mention the late celebrated d'Alembert, a diſtinguiſhed member at the ſame time of the Academy of Sciences, and the French Academy, and an admired writer on a variety of topics. A proficiency in abſtract mathematics is certainly an undoubted proof of great mental capacity; and I ſuppoſe the extent of the ſtudy is ſuch, that no apprehenſions need be entertained of exhauſting its objects. Whether, with no further view, it be worth while to expend ſo much time and exertion upon it, I leave you to determine for yourſelf.

Without tracing further the circle of human knowledge, I ſhall bring my letter to a concluſion after a general obſervation. No kinds of ſtudy can differ more from each other, than the ſame from itſelf, as purſued by a man of a ſtrong, and by one of a weak underſtanding. The firſt will render a ſmall object important; the ſecond, an important one, little. The hiſtory of literature abounds with inſtances

in proof of this aſſertion—I ſhall mention one. Elias Aſhmole in the laſt century obtained conſiderable reputation here in the multifarious character of a *philoſopher*. He was an aſtronomer, but this noble ſcience in his hands turned to judicial aſtrology. He was a chymiſt, but under this title alchemy was the real object of his purſuit. He was a naturaliſt, but his taſte rather led him to be a collector, than a ſcientific obſerver of nature. He was an antiquary, and in that capacity made large collections for the hiſtory of free-maſonry in this country: afterwards he ſoared to the moſt noble order of the Garter, the hiſtory of which, with all its laws and inſtitutions, was his *opus magnum*. In this man were united the valuable qualities of induſtry, exactneſs, and perſeverance; but the foundation of good ſenſe was wanting. How different from one "qui nil molitur inepté," all whoſe purſuits are directed by a ſound underſtanding! Such an one was the wiſe Franklin, who from the moſt trivial facts could de-

duce the moſt important concluſions—who had always ſomething truly valuable in proſpect—and whoſe touch converted every meaner material to gold.

It is not, then, merely the ſpecies of ſtudy, but the mind and ſpirit with which it is purſued, that ſhould regulate our eſtimate of the intellectual powers of the ſtudent. Folly often conceals herſelf under the maſk of ſerioufneſs, and wiſdom ſometimes is light and playful. The latter knows ſhe hazards nothing by occaſionally deſcending from her dignity; whereas folly loſes all by loſing appearances. A great latitude of mental occupation may be admitted, provided good ſenſe preſides over all—that quality which truly is, as our ethical poet aſſerts,

Though no ſcience, fairly worth the ſeven.

Farewell!

LETTER XVIII.

ON THE EXPERIENCE OF LIFE.

It may, perhaps, appear to you, that the ſubject I have choſen to conclude this ſeries of letters, ſhould rather have been introductory; for when any one pretends to take upon himſelf an office denoting ſuperiority, he ought to begin with producing his credentials; and certainly, giving advice is aſſuming an office of that kind. But I had no fear that the perſon I was addreſſing would call in queſtion my claim upon his attention. My ſincere intereſt in his welfare I was ſure he would not doubt; and I confided in his partial eſteem, to give weight and value to my attempts for his inſtruction. Now, however, that I have gone through a conſi-

derable variety of topics important to the conduct of life, and in the courſe of diſcuſſion have found frequent occaſion to take to taſk my own opinions, and examine their origin and foundation, I feel it a matter of conſequence to ſtate with ſome preciſion the advantages to be gained from *the experience of life*, on which my preceptive authority muſt principally depend.

Every man arrived at my age, who looks back upon his paſt ſelf, muſt recollect a great maſs of opinion which, in the progreſs through life, he has found occaſion to alter, as well as many particulars of conduct which he could wiſh to have been differently regulated. Part of this alteration of ſentiment is the ſimple conſequence of being now informed of truths which at an earlier period were concealed from him; but part reſults from a change in his temper, diſpoſition, and general views of things. With reſpect to the firſt, there is no doubt but he has become, if not a wiſer, at leaſt a better informed

informed man, and more capable of adapting proper means to ſuch ends as he chooſes to purſue. The advantages of the experience of life cannot here be queſtioned. They are thoſe of a traveller who has fully explored a track, which he firſt entered as an unknown path, where he was continually ſubject to be bewildered. He is now well qualified to become a guide to others; but it is merely to thoſe who travel the ſame road, and have the ſame deſtination with himſelf. Are riches the object? He ſees where he miſſed a lucky opportunity, and where an expected gain proved a loſs. He ſays to himſelf, and tells others, "I might have been half as rich again as I am, had I always known what I now know." But his eſtimate of the value of wealth remains juſt as it was before; and if he ſet out in life with low and illiberal ideas on this head, they are rather confirmed than meliorated by the courſe he has paſſed through. So it is with other objects which have been made the great aim and

end

end of living, without any exerciſe of true wiſdom in the original choice. Habit has probably ſtrengthened the attachment to theſe objects; and all the benefit of experience has conſiſted in improved ſkill with reſpect to the mode of purſuit. The hoary ſtateſman points out to his ſon the rocks and ſhoals on which he was in danger of being wrecked; but he rather urges than checks his career towards that high ſtation which he himſelf has attained by ſo much toil and anxiety.

It is clearly, then, the intereſt of the young to take the advice of their ſeniors where any ſpecific mark is to be aimed at, which the latter have already reached. But when the queſtion is, how far the maxims, opinions, views, and ſentiments of the older are proper for the adoption of the younger, the deciſion is not ſo obvious. It is commonly charged upon old perſons that they are apt to forget they were ever young. This forgetfulneſs not only renders them leſs indulgent than they ought to be to juvenile errors, but in

ſome meaſure leads them to make a falſe judgment as to the feelings and purſuits of early life. Why has nature made that the ſeaſon of ſanguine expectations, ſtrong attachments, and ardent deſires, but for the purpoſe of ſtimulating to exertions, which may be equally beneficial to ſociety, and ſerviceable to the individual, who is then to lay in great part of the ſtock which is to ſerve him during the journey of life? Many of his efforts may prove abortive; but the habit of making them has been uſeful; and who, but himſelf, can tell what pleaſure has been enjoyed in the chace even of an unattained object? Let not the aged, then, be too ready to ſay to the young, What you are purſuing is not worth the pains—you will never accompliſh your purpoſe—it will all end in diſappointment! This is to "freeze the genial current of the ſoul;" to encourage indolence and apathy, and counteract the manifeſt intentions of nature. If it be wiſdom to believe

That all we act and all we think is vain,

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it is a wiſdom lying, indeed, in a ſmall compaſs, and as eaſily attainable by a Poloniſus as by a Solomon. On the contrary, I regard it rather as the defect than the excellence of age—rather as a proof of declining powers than of matured faculties—that it holds ſo many things as indifferent and inſignificant, about which it was once warmly intereſted. This ſuſpicion is augmented by obſerving what are thoſe *valuable* objects to which the wiſdom of age confines its attention:—generally, mere ſenſual gratifications, trifling amuſements, and the accumulation of wealth, the appetite for which grows ſtronger in proportion as it ceaſes to be the inſtrument of uſe and pleaſure.

Let youth, then, freely purſue the objects appropriated to it, as far as reaſon and innocence permit;—let it purſue them with ardour, but at the ſame time with the judgment and good ſenſe which are neceſſary to their attainment. And as theſe qualities are certainly not the earlieſt product of the mind, but require the aid

of

of time and experience to bring them to maturity, it muſt be deſirable to borrow the uſe of them from advanced years, till they become fully expanded in a perſon's own breaſt. I have readily acknowledged the defects of age with reſpect to mental temperament: thoſe of youth are ſurely not leſs conſpicuous. Violence, impatience, inſtability, credulity, have always been appropriated to the youthful character; and though this character belongs in a much leſs degree to ſome than to others, yet a tendency towards it is perhaps inſeparable from the natural conſtitution of early life.

The caſe in which the qualifying mixture of mature counſels is moſt neceſſary to juvenile deſigns, is when a ſcheme requires the co-operation of many individuals for its ſucceſs. Here, it is ſcarcely poſſible, without the coolneſs of a calculating mind, inſtructed by experience, to make due allowances for the indifference, the languor, the tergiverſation, the contrariety of opinions and intereſts, that will infallibly

infallibly ariſe during the progreſs of any plan of co-operation, and render means, apparently ſufficient, inadequate to their end. Not only does this take place in the great affairs of the world, in which political wiſdom is ſo often baffled for want of due attention to this circumſtance, but it is equally prevalent in all the common concerns of life. The generous and ſanguine confidence of youth, honourably bent upon ſome uſeful or beneficent project, is perpetually mortified by the inactivity or bad faith of coadjutors; and perhaps the ſtrongeſt impreſſions made on unpractiſed minds to the diſparagement of human nature originate from this ſource. It is therefore, in my opinion, better on every account to anticipate this diſappointment, by lowering the expectations young perſons are led to form through a too favourable eſtimate of mankind, than to permit them firſt to be the victims of their error, and then to incur the hazard of running into the oppoſite extreme of miſanthropy and univerſal

verſal diſtruſt. In this point, the experience of age, unſoured by perſonal vexations and ſufferings, may be of important uſe to the young, and demand a due ſhare of deference. I willingly, however, except from this demand the ordinary cant of aged declaimers againſt the increaſing vices of the age, which has been employed from the earlieſt records, and by its univerſality has loſt all claim to credit. All moral evil, as well as moral good, reſults, firſt, from the nature of man, and ſecondly, from the circumſtances in which he is placed. The former remains always the ſame; the latter are ſubject to great and continued fluctuations, but certainly have no general tendency to deterioration.

Knowledge of mankind is the ſcience in a peculiar manner arrogated by thoſe who are advanced in the path of life, and not without ſome reaſon. The more concerns a man has had with his ſpecies, the better, other circumſtances being equal, he muſt underſtand its character.

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This knowledge may be carried ſo far, that, as a mechaniſt can foreſee the final operation of every machine, however complex, which is conſtructed according to known principles, ſo the adept in the world can predict, at leaſt with great probability, the event of any plan of human action, when acquainted with the agents. The great advantages of ſuch a degree of knowledge are obvious. Every one would wiſh to poſſeſs it, and by thoſe who are engaged in the affairs of mankind, it is placed at the head of all intellectual attainments. The numerous miſtakes, however, made by pretenders to this ſcience, may juſtly lead us to ſuſpect, that ſkill in it is not ſo directly the reſult of practice, as practitioners wiſh to have it believed. The truth is, that although experience is eſſential to it, yet experience alone will not teach it. There muſt be a ſolid foundation in the mind itſelf, in order to raiſe the ſuperſtructure of experimental knowledge. In my own profeſſion, I have often obſerved that the

courſe

courſe of a long life has only ſerved to eſtabliſh a ſet of vague theoretical notions, and an unvaried routine of practice, without correcting a ſingle error in either. The French phyſician, Guy Patin, a man of great learning, but of inveterate prejudices, and ſervilely addicted to received modes of practice, ſcarcely ever in his letters mentions the death of a perſon, without adding, "Aye! he was not bled and purged enough." Under the influence of ſuch prepoſſeſſion it may, indeed, be aſſerted, that there is no ſuch thing as experience. For, the horror againſt innovation preventing all trial of new methods, no compariſon is ever inſtituted; and though a perſon may in time become ſenſible that his own modes often fail of ſucceſs, yet, being unacquainted with any other, or incapable of examining them fairly, he continues to think himſelf in the right way;—at leaſt, it is *ſecundum artem*, and that ſatisfies him.

It may be laid down as a certain rule, that neither a weak man, nor one of ſtrong

paſſions and prejudices, is capable of receiving much profit from experience. The firſt is unable from a maſs of ſeparate facts to deduce thoſe general inferences which alone conſtitute true knowledge. In his mind all is confuſed and inſulated; he never diſtinguiſhes exceptions from exemplifications; and he either follows the impreſſion left by the lateſt occurrence, or implicitly adopts ſome maxim he has heard, without comprehending its proper application. The ſecond views facts themſelves in a falſe light. Every thing is changed or diſtorted to his mental viſion, and the impreſſion made by objects is totally diſproportioned to their real nature and magnitude. I have already taken notice of the effects of a party ſpirit in this reſpect; but to a volatile and impetuous temper every ſubject is alike a ſource of partial eſtimation; nor is its natural progreſs from error to truth, but from one error to another. The character known by the name of a *projector* is eminently

of this ſpecies. The failure of all the ſchemes he has ever formed does not cure him of a propenſity to hazard his fortune or reputation in any new project that ſtrikes his fancy; ſince he never imputes his want of ſucceſs to radical defects in the plan, but to ſome caſual circumſtance attending the execution. I have known ſuch perſons, after a life full of the ſevereſt leſſons, leave the world juſt as untaught as they entered it.

From the tenor of the preceding remarks, you will perceive that I am far from ſuppoſing the true experience of life always to accompany length of years. If, therefore, I venture to recommend to your attention the opinions I have advanced in theſe letters on a variety of important topics, it is with the hope that you will find ſome reaſons for taking them into conſideration, beſides that of their proceeding from a ſenior and a father. It is not for me to ſuggeſt theſe; I may, however, be permitted to ſay, that my life, though not an eventful one, has upon

the whole been a favourable mixture of the active and the contemplative; that my connexions with ſociety have been varied and moderately extenſive; and that my temper and habits have not indiſpoſed me from making uſe of the opportunities for obſervation which have preſented themſelves. The correction of my prejudices (for what man is without them?) has long been the moſt ſerious occupation of my mind; with what ſucceſs, I leave others to pronounce. Some will probably think that much prejudice ſtill remains. I will not affirm that it is not ſo, but would hope that I am ſtill open to conviction, where error ſhall be proved againſt me. The ſtate of health which has compelled me to quit the ſcenes of buſineſs, has at length fixed me in a quiet and agreeable retreat, friendly to that progreſs in mental improvement which is ſtill my humble aim. If I may yet be enabled to contribute any thing to the amuſement or inſtruction of my countrymen, particularly the younger part of

them, I ſhall reflect with ſatisfaction on the meaſure of life and exertion aſſigned me, and feel no further ſolicitude, but that the termination of the latter may be that of the former.

My dear and worthy ſon,

Adieu!

J. A.

Stoke Newington,
November 10, 1799.

THE END.

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